

PANIC BUTTON #8



\$1.00

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An editorial of sorts...

Well to begin with, the inevitable has finally happened. It's been years in the making and I honestly thought I'd never see the day. Crawford is one thing - if he's got a bug up his ass, he draws funny pictures of ya instead of taking out eleven people at a McDonalds with an Uzi. But now, in the latest issue of Jersey Beat, it's happened again. This time, I've forgotten the name of the artist, but the result is the same: I have officially become a cartoon character.

After years of hearing just about every imaginable rumor about myself, after years of attacking others in print with no consideration for karma whatsoever (well, y'know, every once in a great while, I'm WRONG!), after years of seemingly practically begging for it, I've got it. Going out to gigs ain't so much fun anymore.

Well, they say you oughta be careful what ya ask for 'cause ya just might get it and they, whoever they are, are right. So I know that I've brought this on myself. On the other hand, when you have the time to sit and brood that I do, ya find yourself thinking that maybe there's something a little bit better out there. Mykel Board wrote a letter which I've reproduced for you on the next page. My response to it caused me to go back four years to the first column I ever wrote for MRR. And in refuting Mykel's slanderous attacks I discovered that in a lot of ways, I actually DO feel the same way about a lot of things as I did back then. I don't wanna be in a band for a living. Yeah, it's a hell of a lot better than anything else I'm qualified for, but I guess it's time I got qualified for something else.

Looking back at the first column I wrote for MRR, I realized that I was right - I really oughta start doing other things that can make me money so I won't have to keep dragging my band out like a Vegas act. So to make a long story short, aside from some A&R work I'm doing for Lookout, I'm dumping everything for the next six months so I can concentrate on writing the stuff I've been meaning to write for the past three years. Which is where you come in.

If you're a subscriber, I'll happily refund your money; I have no idea when I'll have another issue out - well, not NO idea; probably sometime this summer. I AM NOT TAKING ANY NEW SUBSCRIPTIONS!!! As for old ones, I can keep you on the list or I can send back your dough minus the money for this issue. It's up to you. Sorry about all this, but I really need to slow down. Actually, the fanzine is one of my favorites of the projects I've tackled in the past year so once I've started to get my shit together in other respects, it'll probably be the first thing I get to.

Labels: I'm not taking ads quite yet. If you're a regular advertiser, I'll contact you when I know I'm gonna have another issue out. If you wanna keep sending promo, go

ahead but I can't guarantee it'll get reviewed before the band breaks up...

And to answer some of your frequently asked questions, no I don't wanna write something for your fanzine, no the band doesn't want to do a show in your town, no the band didn't break up, no I didn't quit writing a column for MRR (and I don't plan on it, though I will NOT send some piece of crap in if I really have nothing to write about in any particular month...), and no I'm not clinically insane.

About this issue: I finally got a couple of good local writers to do some stuff for me. Brian Czarnik and Paul Keller both have short but sweet pieces in here and I hope you'll seek out their other writings (they both have ads in this issue - Paul's is for Ebb fanzine). The Nirvana thing was a complete gas, made even better by the fact that Jawbreaker were along wisecracking the whole way. The interview with Johnny Ramone was great fun - it's always nice to meet a hero and not be let down. The record reviews are lame, I know it so don't bother telling me. I must've used the word punk 300 times. Too bad. God, I hate music.

As I was writing this I got a call from Johnny Ramone. I'd sent him the Ramones cover album by Screeching Weasel that he'd requested along with a bunch of other junk and a letter. He was just calling to say thanks and to discuss baseball and gore flicks. He also said that he'd just met with some people over at Rhino to discuss the release of a six CD box set filled with live Ramones shows from '76 to present day, as well as one full CD with nothing but unreleased Ramones stuff. Also in the planning stages in Ramonesland is a possible video series with the same concept; shows from '76 on. It'll put a dent in my pocket book, but if my instincts about Johnny are right, it'll be totally qualitative and worth every cent.

Johnny Ramone is a stand up guy. It's amazing that there are so many outright buttholes in the punk scene, and yet the guy who invented punk rock is not only still around, but is one of the most decent people I've yet to meet in punkland. I'll tell ya, before I hang up my Screeching Weasel hat, I hope I get the chance to open for the Ramones. By the way, buy their new album, Acid Eaters. You may be surprised. I know that when I finally put down the cash for the Mondo Bizarro CD (after looking foolish in the interview for not having heard it), I was kinda shocked to find how good it is; as you can tell from my little Ramones discography, I haven't been too impressed with what they've done in the past ten years.

Lastly, thanks for buying, swiping, scamming or whatever the hell you did to get your hands on this issue. It's the best I could do in three weeks time and I figure at the very least, you should get about five average-length visits to the toilet out of it. Ok - **BEN WEASEL**



LETTERS



August 16 1993

Dear Mr. Ben

A quick note before we leave on our next disastrous tour. I just read PANIC BUTTON. Thanks for the kind remarks (though too brief) on our Chicago appearance.

Ben -

Calling people ugly ain't funny - shit, I've seen you a dozen times & you look like an overgrown potato, dick. "Fuck you and your crew, unless I'm getting paid too." Die-C.O. Oxnard CA

Alright, which one of you rascals stole this goober's medication????

Ben Weasel -

Although I really hate to kiss ass, I just have to. I saw your show last night and I picked up a Panic Button. I have to tell you, you are an excellent writer. The article on Jawbreaker was amazing. There is no probably about it - Chesterfield King is the best love song ever. This letter sounds like it should be written to Jawbreaker but your writing really pushes buttons in me (leaving a hack like me feeling like Soliere listening to Mozart). That is a great statement. Most of the ignorant people that read that probably thought, "What the hell is this?". I sure didn't. It raised my respect for you. Everybody thinks you're such an asshole and are always sending their little bitch letters. Well I just wanted you to know I really respect you and your writing and through all the shit that's talked about you, I'll bet you're a really nice guy. - Jim Becker Chicago

Somebody pinch me, I gotta be dreaming.

Ben -

Thanks for the new PB, I'm all a-blush over the nice things you said. Mmmm. Oh my, what's this? Uh oh, a boner! I gotta go now. See ya, John Crawford

John - I don't get it...

The funniest thing (though unintentional in the way it's funny) is your encounter with the dumb punk. You claim that you were "kidding" when you used to claim other folks weren't true punks. Reread your early columns. Doesn't sound kidding to me. Most hilarious is when you ask the dumb girl, "What does making money have to do with DIY?" If you remember, one of our first disagreements was when you wrote in MRR that bands should NOT make money off punk. If they want to make money, you said "they should get a job!" Ho ho, a little touring and the words come out of the mouths other side.

As a matter of fact, except for the "ass-kicking" part, that article sounds word-for-word like a conversation you and I could've had five years ago-- with you playing the part of the girl!! Fun, fun, fun.

Please print this letter in the next P.B. If you'd like, you can even put an italics answer after it:

I was wrong, Mykel. You were right.
-- Ben

See ya,
Mykel Board
New York

Mr. Board refers (I think) to my very first MRR column in which I suggested that in order to avoid dragging their tired ass around the country playing tunes that were ten years old, maybe 7 Seconds should've planned for a real career. Slightly out of context, Mykel. Also note that Mykel talks about a conversation we "could've" had five years ago. Yeah, and I "could've" said that Artless revolutionized punk rock. But I didn't. Some of my early columns are shockingly dumb, but I even back then I supported a band's right to make money...

As you know, I don't review fanzines. There are almost as many bad fanzines as there are bad records and that's just too much badness for one man to handle. But every once in a while I get a juicy piece of pulp in the mail and TALES OF BLARG is one such rag.

Janelle, A.K.A. Olga Snodgrass is perhaps the best living eighteen year old writer in the world. In this issue, she's writing what amounts to a diary, but a pretty cool diary, like one that would make a good movie 'cause she's such the adventuress. Whether she's travelling around the country commenting on varied cultures or hanging out in her own backyard, Janelle's tales come through. Read how she lost a potential boyfriend by accidentally leading him into a situation where he got soaked by a booby-trapped bucketful of less-than-pleasant fluid. Check out her hilarious cartoons. Travel with her to Chicago as she makes friends with way too many people for her to ever be a serious candidate for living here. It's all great. Send your cash.

TALES OF BLARG #6



**\$1.00 or trade to P.O. Box 4047/
Berkeley CA/ 94701 *NO CHECKS***

PANIC BUTTON
P.O. BOX 62
PROSPECT HTS. IL 60070

PUBLISHED SOMEWHAT
QUARTERLY

NO SUBSCRIPTIONS!!!

Cover photo by Shawn Scallen

Back issues available for \$2.00 ppd. each:

#6 - good ol' days crapola, jobs I've hated chapter one, and plenty more crap
#7 - Screeching Weasel & The Queens on tour from 3 different perspectives, Jawbreaker, the usual junk...

NO CHECKS!

WHERE THE GIGS ARE

In which your jaded, beaten-down-by-life editor, rather than sitting down and peddling misinformation, rumors, and outright bullshit, hands over the computer to someone who actually goes to gigs.

by
Brian Czarnik

What's this, you say? Brian writing for Panic Button? The kid who plays in Oblivion (slammed by Ben in P.B. #7), the kid who has been seen wearing an "I Hate Ben Weasel" t-shirt, the kid who is also friends with Marc Ruvulo? ... Yes I say, to all of the above. To answer: It was only a review, it's only a shirt and it's only their dispute.

Now that that's out of the way, let me take you on a journey through the great Chicagoland scene, which doesn't seem to be ruined yet by national exposure. When I see Riki Rachman wearing a Los Crudos shirt, then I'll pack my bags.

The one cool thing about all of our little scenes is that they're all safe. It may not seem like much, but you'd be surprised at how violent other cities have it. When was the last time someone around here was seriously injured at a punk show? Let's count our blessings. Also, with all of these scenes combined we cover any kind of punk you could ask for. I'd rather stand in a little line and pay a few bucks to see a cool local band that's doin' the same shit as some band that you have to hang out at the dreaded China Club (or some other messed up place) to see.

There seems to be a recent shortage of clubs to play in the city. The Collective Chaos crew have The Bop Shop on Division. Their shows aren't advertised all that well but if you can find out about them they're usually pretty good. The sound is decent and you can fit around 150 people in the place if you wanted to. The average crowd is around 30 people. Suburban kids don't seem to make it into the big city for these shows. I think they're afraid they'll have to become anarchists in order to be let in. Not so, just don't shower for a week and wear old baggy clothes and you'll fit right in. The Czar Bar (right across the street) puts on over-21 punk shows occasionally. Homocore has been known to book some good bands in there on Thursday nights. I had a chance to see Pansy Division there. They seemed less gay during their soundcheck. But when show time rolled around it was boys nite out.

The other city club is the Wrigley Side. They try to hold shows there once a month on Sundays. If you can make it up the steep stairs it's worth the climb. The audience is mixed with both city and suburban punks. The only problem is that the stage is about 6 inches off the ground. So if you're in front and the crowd lunges forward (they tend to get a little crazy there) you'll be left with a nice bruise that'll stay on your leg for weeks. The sound is great - if the soundguy feels like working at it that night.

Heading out of the city, the next closest scene is the faithful Elmhurst bunch. Still in mourning over McGregor's, these kids manage to put on some O.K. shows at churches and the local Y.M.C.A. The crowd tends to be made up of local high schoolers who put on the plaid and venture out with daddy's station wagon for a night of punk. The bands that frequent these shows are mostly suburban groups. It's about a 50/50 rate. Some bands have a good thing going and others should stick to going to the shows instead of playing at them. Another thing that sometimes sucks with these shows is that there always seems to be a band or two that gets added on the bill at the last minute. Seeing four bands is all right, but seeing six is as dreadful as tongue kissing your grandmother.

A recent addition to this area has been the Oak Brook scene. It's actually this kid having shows at his huge, four car garage, million dollar home. The sound sucks due to a low ceiling basement but that doesn't stop hundreds of kids from showing up to bob their heads to the local stars. The people tend to be a little cliquish and are the kind of people I hated in high school. I just can't get my punkness up for the evening when I arrive in this beautiful neighborhood... How can any band sing about oppression when their parents are footin' the bill for everything? Nevertheless, if you're a "happy-go-lucky" like Dan Panic (who has fun at these shows) all this won't spoil your good time.

Heading down south a little (S. 294) toward Indiana is the Homewood scene. Pete from Winepress sets up shows at a club that's attached to the Record Swap. The shows are well attended (what the hell else do these kids have to do?). The MTV generation doesn't miss a beat here. They have their stage diving techniques down pat. Once again, I personally have a hard time fittin' in at these shows. At 22 I feel like an old man. This place does have some macho-type bouncers but they seem to leave people alone. I saw one bouncer standing in front of a concrete wall, pushing kids away from it. I guess they'll do anything to cop some cheap feels off of the very pretty girls out there. It's something to do with well water that makes these hick chicks so damn hot but oh so illegal. Oh yea, the sound is good and you get free pizza if you're in a band (unless you're Ben Weasel).

Over to the Elgin scene, where bands like Hoodwink and the Smoking Popes are god. Turners club has stopped having shows. I didn't like that place due to its gymnasium acoustics. One cool thing about the place was it had a neat authentic Mexican joint across the street.

Now the scene is contained in VFW halls and people's basements. The same can be said for the northern Illinois scenes as well. Basement shows are cool (I like the intimacy) but bands seem to play too long and you barely make gas money. But hey, who's in it for the money, right? The punk bands up there have more of an alternative flair. Sometimes this is good but mostly it means they want to be like Pearl Jam but won't admit it.

I probably forgot some stuff, but hey, I can't go out to every little scene. I got a life too...

THE NANNY & THE ROCK STAR

For lack of a better title.... Look, I did my best to get a scoop goddamnit, so just play along!

The call came in sometime in the early morning hours. I do not answer my phone in the early morning hours. The machine does. The caller, chummy enough with me to know my home number, but yet not enough of a pal to leave his name, instead left the following message: "I just heard that Jawbreaker is doing a week in the southwest with Nirvana and Mudhoney, so I guess that shoots your theory to shit, doesn't it, pal?"

I got the message in the morning. An hour later I got a call from Pfahler.

"You won't beleive what happened," he said.

"You're doing a week with Nirvana and Mudhoney in the southwest," I said, fairly pleased with myself.

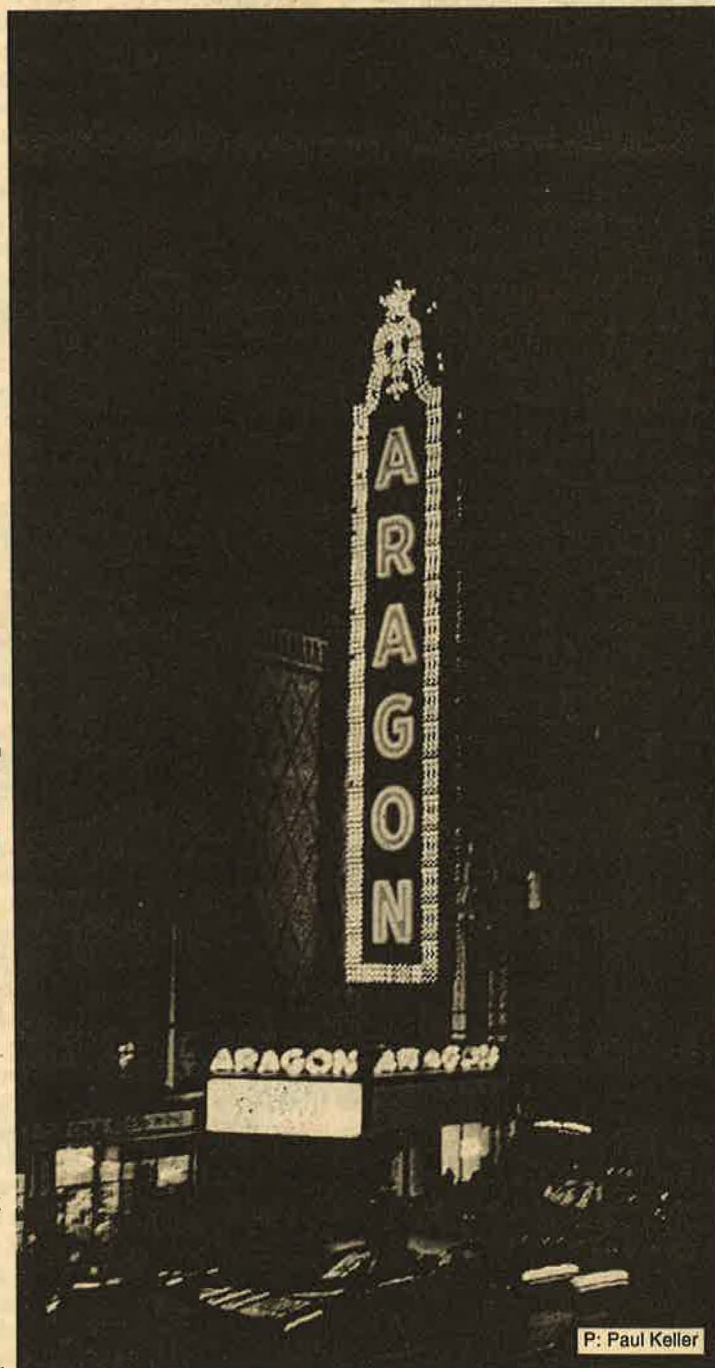
"Jesus," he said. "We only found out yesterday ourselves..."

It isn't too surprising. Jawbreaker's many detractors in the punk scene have been waiting for something like this and they were already jumping all over everyone in the band.

The tour, however, wasn't just in the southwest. Jawbreaker did six shows with Nirvana and two of them were in Chicago. I was provided with the opportunity to document the backstage goings on at a big time rock show, a chance I couldn't pass up as a tenacious Panic Button reporter.

I don't know if it was worth their time or all the shit they had to put up with from the hardline punks, but as for me, well, I'm a reporter damnit, and I go where the story is. Even if I have to dig one up.

We arrive at the Aragon around 3:00 P.M. As we attempt to get into the parking lot reserved for band vehicles, we're stopped by a stereotypical Chicago mook who asks the threatening yet polite sounding question, "CAN I HELP YOU?" Chris spends a few minutes conversing with the guy and finally convinces him that we are indeed authorized to park in the lot. We pull up next to the two big tour



P: Paul Keller

buses rented by Nirvana. They have been christened "Wave Dancer" and "Blue Mirage", complete with cheeseball airbrush paintings on the back that have me wondering if Loretta Lynn might be making a guest appearance tonight. The people from the catering truck and the security pay no attention to us as we file into the building from the alley entrance. We head for the Jawbreaker dressing room, a drab little white-walled hole. There aren't many people around, save for the occasional security thug and the caterers, who are busy preparing the meal for the night.

I walk out onto the balcony of the dressing room and look down at the few Nirvana fans who are already camped out outside the club. The 'L' train rushes by about every ten minutes or so. Kinda boring. I am here to get a scoop. The boys have already warned me that my chances are slim, but I'm certain that my charm and determination will get me SOMETHING to write about. I vow to keep my scoop antennae up throughout the entire debacle.

Bill (Jawbreaker's roadie) suggests that we visit the tour coordinator to get a pass for yours truly and demand extra beer for the evening. We worm our way through a labyrinth of dark walkways back to the office of the man in charge of the tour, Jeff. Jeff is on the phone so we sit down and wait, chatting with Karina, head caterer. Once we have Jeff's attention, Bill and Chris mention my need for a pass (it would be taken care of later), turn in the guest list (which would go through fifty miles of red tape before reaching the front door; the people running the tour all have laptop computers and walkie talkies. Instead of simply walking the guest list downstairs, they have to put it into the computer and route it through Dante's Inferno and back before it reaches the grubby hands of the will call people) and mention the fact that another 12 pack

would be nice. Giving a fatherly grin, Jeff asks, "Do you really need all that beer?" Apparently this is a reference to the fact that Chris has gotten severely blasted at several of the shows prior to today. Chris assures him that we do indeed need all that beer and Jeff, sighing heavily, says he'll do his best.

Now it's time to explore and Bill, having been at the Aragon for the show two days prior, agrees to show me around. We inspect every corner of the building, constantly discovering neat little things that I'd never noticed in my previous visits to the Aragon. The stage left balcony for instance, is closed off for people with backstage passes. This is where the caterers prepare the meal and set up the dining table. Later, it will serve as seating for the privileged few with the all-important passes.

The stage is set up for Nirvana. Two cheesy mannequins that have been mutated into resembling the figure on the new Nirvana album cover flank the stage. Little bits of shrubbery and such are glued around here and there. The band's amps are covered over with red velvet cloth; set up in front of them are itsy bitsy Marshall practice amps. What a bunch of funny guys. Bill remarks that so far, not a single audience member has seemed to understand Nirvana's wacky sight gag.

Bill and I head to the floor, where we quickly discover that it has recently been waxed, making it a perfect little skating rink. We skate around for a while (and of course, nobody bugs us; when you BELONG in a joint like this, you can get away with just about anything).

As I glide toward the stage, I hear Blake yell my name from the balcony and at the same time, a small rectangular box hits the floor next to me. A-ha! It's my Kools. One of the perks, you see, of being on a big tour like this is that before the show, a gopher will run and get the bands and crew certain necessities, like aspirin, moist towelettes or butts. For me it's free Kools. It's already been worth my while to show up.

Our ears are suddenly assaulted by a deafening blast of white noise from the stage monitors. Apparently this is how professional soundpeople test their gear. It's horrifying, but nowhere near as bad as the gigantic Scot with a mohawk and three square miles of tattoos who then proceeds to test Cobain's amp by playing the riff from Godzilla (read: Smells Like Teen Spirit) complete with very metal solos. I wonder if the massive mohican knows all the solos from Purple Rain; practically the entire crew (90% Scottish) worked on the last Prince tour...

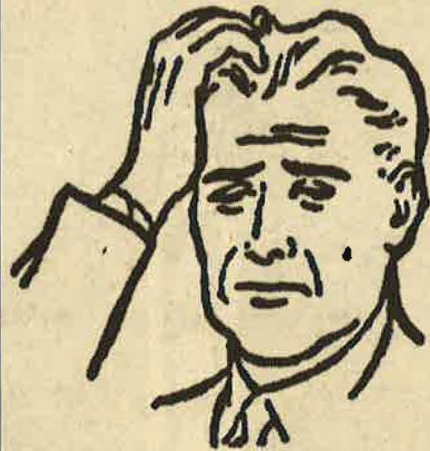
I go back to my skating competition with Bill and literally just about run into a kid who has come in from the side entrance. He introduces himself as the guy who used to be in the Lonely Trojans, a college pop punk band from downstate. He snuck in to get an interview with Mudhoney. Mudhoney, unfortunately, is not around. He follows us around for a while and then loses interest and goes back outside, asking us to make sure to try to get him in when the fabled Mudhoney shows up. Hearing the tail end of his plea, Adam remarks, "Fuck that." Um, ok.

Back in the dressing room, I am handed my pass. It's a laminated doohinkey with a photo of a man dressed in lingerie lying in a bathtub, the word "PRINCESS" scrawled across his belly. At the bot-

tom, it says "VIP". I am told that this pass is second only to the all-access passes that the bands and crew get and one or two steps above the passes that friends and relatives get. Theoretically, I can go anywhere backstage except for Nirvana's dressing room. I place the pass around my neck, determined to exploit my first and probably last backstage pass for as long as I can.

We are told that dinner is ready. We sit down at the end of the long table on the balcony and are given a variety of choices for a main course, including, according to Johnny (one of the caterers), "Eggplant, artichoke hearts, red onions and parmesan, lamb chops with baby onions, mushrooms and mint pesto, roast turkey with mustard sauce, salmon with roast pepper salsa and a pumpkin herb swiss cheese goullet." I don't know what that last one is and neither does Johnny. In addition to all this, there are salads, cheese and crackers, various breads, pastries and cookies and a variety of sodas, bottled waters and Gatorade. I ask Karina if the salmon has

Our Inquiring Reporter



bones.

"I already told you it's a fillet," she exclaims in her thick Scottish accent.

"A what??"

"A fillet!"

She looks at me as if I may be a bit retarded. I'm utterly confused. Blake jumps in.

"Ben, she means 'fill-ay'," he says, pronouncing it correctly instead of phonetically. Now I get it. I ask from whence the fish came. Karina is getting frustrated.

"I don't know," she says between clenched teeth. "Would you like to know which waters it swam in?"

Johnny tells me it's Alaskan. Karina peers at me as if deciding whether or not to clobber me over the head.

The meal is excellent of course, mispronunciations and thinly veiled hostility notwithstanding.

Mudhoney finally shows up and Bill tells them that there's someone outside who wants to interview them. One of them looks out the dressing room window and says, laughing, "I don't know him". He walks away. But not far enough away. The band member and his tour manager have staked out the

Jawbreaker dressing room, talking loudly about stupid shit. Tape recorder in hand, I approach them.

"You guys are from Seattle, huh," I say brightly.

Mr. Mudhoney gets all serious like I'm doing some sort of important interview.

"Yeah," he answers.

"What did you think of the Mariners this year?"

Mr. M ponders this one for a moment.

"Y'know, the Mariners, baseball.... Are you a fan?"

"Uh, no, not really. I saw Gaylord Perry's 300th win. And I saw one game this year. Griffey hit a home run but I missed it 'cause I was walking around."

"What about the Seahawks?" I ask, grinning like an escaped lunatic.

"I don't follow football too much. I heard they're doing ok this year."

Now I'm wondering why the hell the poor guy downstairs even wanted to interview these chumps. I sit back down as the manager starts blabbering about his father who was a mountain climber or some stupid shit. I am not impressed. What the fuck kind of sport is mountain climbing? Seeing that I've turned off the recorder, the two imbeciles resume their inane conversation, talking way too loud as they've already consumed a few beers. Why the hell they don't go next door to their own dressing room is a mystery to me, until I peek down the hallway and see that every scumbag leech in the history of the Chicago music inside is already next door hobnobbing with the other knobs that comprise Mudhoney.

Sitting back down in the chair, I ponder the fact that Jawbreaker doesn't seem too keen on these geeks being in their dressing room. In fact, they'd told me earlier that the other night they walked into their room to find Mudhoney huffing away on pot. What a wonderful sight that must've been.

I lean forward in my chair about and say loudly, "I'M FROM CALIFORNIA!"

The conversation stops for a second and they look at me blankly.

"I'M THE PRESIDENT OF LOOKOUT RECORDS."

Silence.

"YOU KNOW - LOOKOUT RECORDS???? YA LIKE LOOKOUT RECORDS??? YA LIKE HARLEY'S? I GOTTA HARLEY!!!"

They leave the room. Mission accomplished.

The crowd is filing in. I go over to the balcony and glance down at them. Not a pretty sight. I start to get slightly queasy thinking about the fact that there will soon be over five thousand people packed inside this venue. I go back to the dressing room and begin a game of cribbage with Chris (always thinking ahead, I'd brought my board along). After giving him a sound thrashing, I retire to the toilet where I take a dump whilst perusing the cheesy cowboy outlaw book that Blake picked up somewhere out west. I also chew down a Xanax; there's only about 30 minutes until Jawbreaker hits the stage and what started out (I thought) as a joke has turned into a reality - I am to introduce Jawbreaker tonight.

To get myself up for it, I pull out my little tape recorder and begin to make idiotic notes to myself, occasionally interviewing anyone who comes my way. I walk out onto the side balcony and look at the people waiting for the 'L'. Another crew member stands out there alone. I approach him, tape running.

"How does the crowd look tonight?" I ask, thrusting the recorder in his face. "Ugly?"

"Oh yeah, very," he says. "They haven't improved."

"Do they frighten you as they frighten me?"

He gives a nervous laugh. "They terrify me."

I'm out of questions, but I've never let that stop me before.

"Do you ever worry that England will declare war on you?"

"No," he says thoughtfully. "They know that most of the income in the U.K. comes from Scotland. They'd never do that."

I'm a bit dejected. No dirt, no scoops, no nothing.

I head downstairs to the stage, where Bill is putting out the set lists. The crowd is cheering him. I walk onstage to ask him if I have time to hand out some Panic Buttons. He tells me I have fifteen minutes. I go back upstairs (after flashing my nifty pass at the security guards), grab the fanzines and go back out to the crowd. I have 100 copies with me. They're gone in about three minutes. One girl doesn't seem to want to take a copy.

"What is it?" she asks suspiciously.

"It's a fanzine."

Nothing.

"Punk rock."

Plenty of vacancies in this motel.

"IT'S FREE!"

"Awesome!" she says, grabbing for it.

Looking around, it hits me that the room is almost filled to capacity. I finish handing out the fanzines as little waves of dizziness hit

me every few seconds. I start to head for the stairs and the safety of the dressing room when I run into Vapid and Mary who are standing around sipping beers, unable to get upstairs due to the status of their passes. The security squad has informed them that they'll be allowed behind the lines IF accompanied by someone with a higher level pass and only AFTER

the dinner table has been cleared. Wouldn't want 'em eating that dumpster-bound food would we?

I'm having a nice little chat with them when a security guard lumbers over; he's spotted my tape recorder.

"Can I help you?" he asks.

"No," I say, smiling away like crazy.

"I'll need to take that," he replies, smiling back. "I'll

female security guard. They both walk back toward me, determination etched in their previously blank faces. Just as I'm about to receive a tongue lashing, I get bumped by a passer by. My jacket slides open a little further, revealing my VIP pass. Their expressions immediately change.

"You're ok. I didn't see that," says my friend the security guard, pointing at my pass. "I'm just doing my job y'know."

Yeah, I know.

I amble back toward the stairs, flash my pass and am halfway up when I spot a snotty looking collegiate-hippie type. I flip the recorder on.

"Excuse me," I say, making sure my pass is showing. "I'm doing an interview for Rolling Stone. Why are you here?"

The college boy looks at me blankly. I grab the pass and waggle it around furiously.

"Whattya think this is, buddy? Ya think they just GIVE these out??? WHO ARE YOU HERE TO SEE???"

My mock indignation has fanned whatever small flame of wit flickers inside his puny brain.

"I'm here to see both Mudhoney AND Nirvana."

"What about Jawbreaker?"

"I've never heard of them."

"Oh," I say, successfully concealing my disgust.

"You're in for a treat."

Hippie boy moves on, but a gaggle of teenaged boys who look like they just smoked their first joint has overheard. One of them asks how much I had to pay for the pass.

"I DID NOT PAY FOR THIS!" I say into the recorder. "I AM PAID TO DO THIS!!!"

"Oh," he says.

"I'm with Hit Parader magazine," I say, calming down a bit.

Seeing that the recorder is going, he uses

this chance to express his individuality.

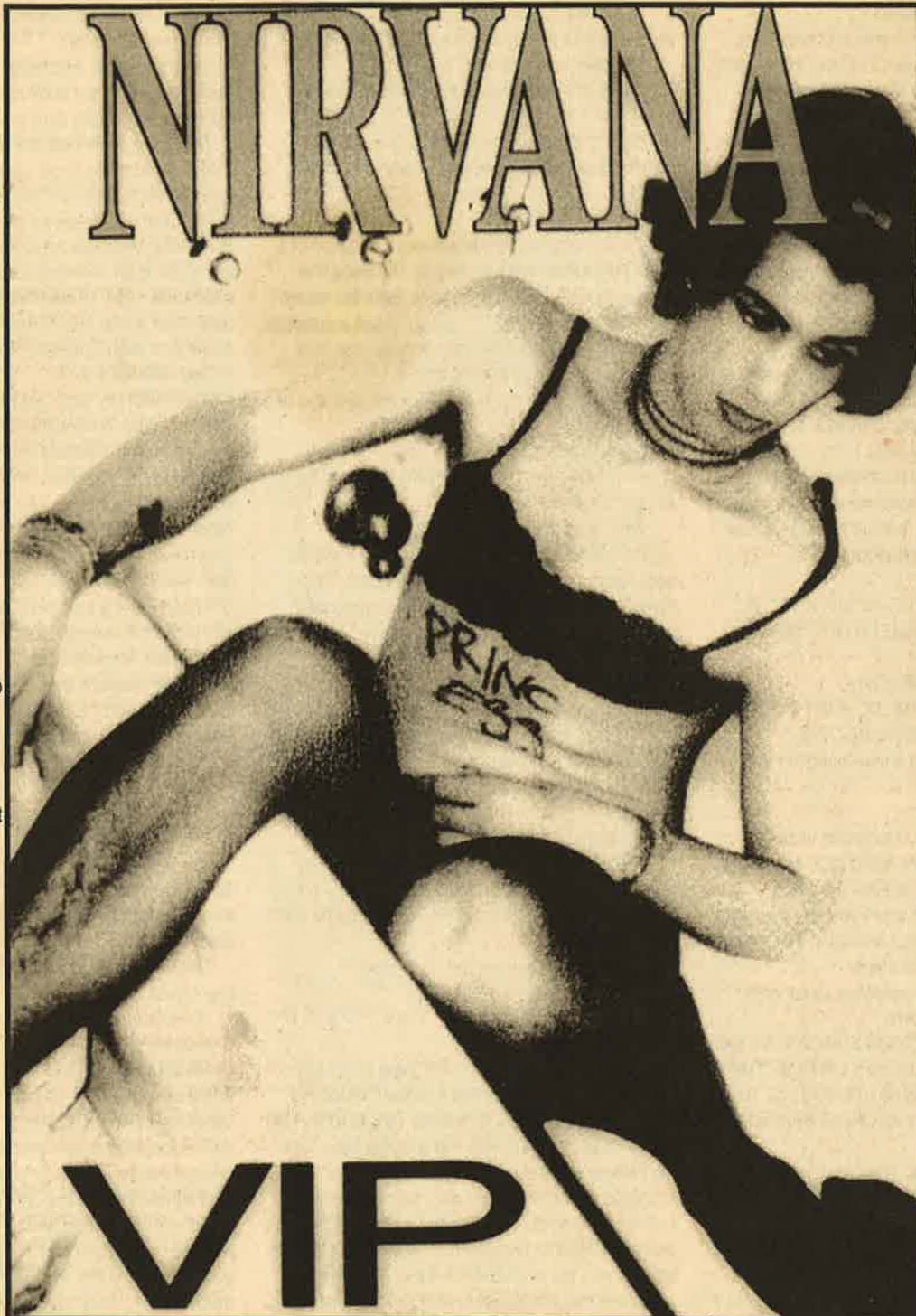
"My name is Chris and, uh, therefore I am."

Huh???

His buddy jumps in. "Hi, I'm Justin and all your music's great, 'cause... I'm one of your biggest fans."

"What music is that?"

"Uh, Nirvana..."



put it in the office and you can get it after the show."

I go into a long explanation about the recorder, lying my ass off about being a member of the press and having special permission from Jeff to carry the thing around. I know these mooks. They don't have the balls to go to Jeff with such petty shit. The mook goes over to the bottom of the stairs and consults a

"Ok."

"If there wasn't us," he continues, "There would be no you."

Hoo boy.

"That's true," I say agreeably. "You know, I think you boys have a lot of potential."

Their third pal, who's been standing back, suddenly grows balls.

"CENSORSHIP SUCKS!!!"

Good God! How to respond?

"Oh yeah," I say firmly. "Censorship does suck."

"Fuck censorship," he says, this time more quietly, as if pouting over the unfair fact that mom's just grounded him for a week.

"Damn right. FUCK CENSORSHIP!!!"

The boys cheer and I move on, impressed with the possibilities for our nation's future.

I hop onto the stage to ask how much time I have before my introduction. Bill informs me that I have to do it NOW. Oh shit. I have no idea what I'm going to say. I have to say something besides, "Here's Jawbreaker." I am not a spoken word artist. I am not much of an ad libber. I wish that my bowels didn't feel like they'd just crumbled into a wet mush.

Jawbreaker is ready to go. They look at me.

I walk over to the center stage mike and am immediately greeted by the room-shaking roar of an impatient five thousand headed monster. I'm aware of a vague nagging feeling that the recorder is running inside my zipped jacket pocket.

"Good evening."

(MASSIVE AUDIENCE ROAR. MY VOICE IS LOUDER THAN IT'S EVER BEEN OR EVER WILL BE)

"You don't even know who I am!"

(MORE MASS HYSTERIA. DO THEY EVEN HEAR THE WORDS I'M SPEAKING???)

"Let me introduce to you a fine young trio from San Francisco."

(SCREAMS, CHEERS)

"They've worked hard for years and years..."

(MORE SCREAMS - AN AUDIENCE MEMBER UP FRONT YELLS AN OBSCENITY AT ME)

"Didn't your mother ever teach you any manners?" I say, looking straight at him. He laughs. The massive beast rears its ugly head yet again.

"These young men play punk rock, a concept most of you are unfamiliar with."

(THE AUDIENCE REACTION SUGGESTS THAT THEY EITHER THINK I'M MOSES OR ELSE THEY DON'T KNOW OR CARE WHAT I'M SAYING. BANSHEES, SCREAMING, SCRATCHING BANSHEES, EVERY ONE OF THEM)

"They've slept with dogs. They've slogged through shit. They've gone through hell just to come here and entertain you at eighteen dollars a head."

(THE SALIVATING MONSTER SEEMS ON THE VERGE OF EXPLODING. HALF-PANICKED, I WONDER WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I ACTUALLY SAID SOMETHING OF SUBSTANCE. NO TIME FOR THAT...)

"All I can say is..."

(I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING TO SAY. NO, NOT THIS! I CAN'T GO LIMP NOW! JESUS CHRIST, I FEEL A GODDAMN RIOT COMING ON. THINK THINK THINK!!!!)

I speak the first three words that pop into my

befuddled head.

"Christ, you're stupid."

Jawbreaker kicks in and I hide behind Blake's amp with Bill. I'm actually trembling.

Back in the dressing room I ask Vapid to rate my introduction on a scale of 1 to 10. Before he can answer, Chris pipes up.

"You called them stupid punks."

"No I didn't. I said THIS is punk and I told 'em they were stupid for paying eighteen bucks a head."

"You said punk is stupid," says Bill.

"I thought it was great," says Vapid. "I give it an eight."

"Well," Adam says dryly, "If you had said the band's name you might've gained a couple more points..."

A young long haired guy wearing a mutation of a Black Flag t-shirt walks in carrying The Baby, the infamous product of Cobain's loins. He's the nanny. Wait! It's the guy on the VIP pass! I sense a potential scoop. He's quite friendly and I discover that he's familiar with my band and my writing.

He seems comfortable enough. I ask him how he got the job.

"I got the offer and I turned it down," he says.

"Then three months later I still didn't have any money so I just called 'em and said ok."

"What qualified you for this position?"

"I'm trusted..." he stops for a moment while the baby lets out a particularly piercing scream. "I'm trusted in that camp. I have no baby experience. I turned twenty the day I started doing this."

"HOW old are you??"

"Twenty."

Pat Smear, ex-Germ and current Nirvana rhythm guitarist, has entered with a Heineken in his hand. He makes himself at home, joking with everyone in the room. He's an instant hit - a zany punker with a knack for the snappy comeback. I think I may be onto something here. I approach the matter delicately.

"How did Pat get on the tour?" I ask the nanny.

"I was playing the Australian bootleg, what is that on, Ghost Of Darb Records? And he shouted it out. PAT! I'll call Pat!"

"Come on. Did you get him on the tour?"

The nanny answers very quietly.

"Yes."

I've realized that things aren't going to get any better for me than they are at this point. I have my scoop. **THE NANNY IS RUNNING THE SHOW.** The nanny leaves the baby with Pat while he goes out to the balcony to catch up on old times and Bay Area happenings with Blake. Pat and I banter back and forth as he attempts to hang onto both a baby and his Heineken. He's an unpretentious sorta guy, quick witted and very out of place on this tour. He jokingly complains that there are no M&M's in the Nirvana dressing room. Bill and I quietly hatch a quick plan to give him all the fucking M&M's he wants at an appropriate time.

"Are you a permanent member of the band?" I ask politely.

"I don't know," he says. "It's never been discussed."

I can't tell if he's kidding or not. I mean, he *is* living

with the Cobain family in Seattle. It never came up??? Whatever. He undoubtedly brings a punk rock credibility to the tour. He insists that no one in the crowd knows who he is. They probably don't, but the critics sure do.

When the nanny comes back I inform him of my angle. He seems to get a kick out of it. Pat remarks that the nanny is the sole reason Jawbreaker's on the tour. I ask if this is true. He hesitates for a few moments. Finally he speaks.

"Ummmm.... yeah."

More punk rock credibility, and it's all engineered quite innocently by a punk rock kid who's not even old enough to legally drink a beer.

My theory confirmed, I'm basically satisfied, though I'd sure like to get a peek into Nirvana's dressing room. The nanny is more than happy to help me out, and a large crowd follows him through the corridors to the dressing room. I head over to Smear, who's sitting on a window ledge. While we politely insult each other, unbeknownst to me, those members of our group with the less-important passes are asked by a security guard, "Can I help you?" and quickly ushered out.

There isn't too much happening in the Nirvana dressing room. A huge bowl of fruit and a nice selection of sodas and bottled waters sit on the bar. The proprietors of Shangri-La in my old neighborhood, Roscoe Village, sit alone on one of the white pleather couches that looks to have been jacked from Graceland. They must know somebody or they would have been kicked out by now.

I head into the bathroom to take a whizz. It's big, and unlike the communal public-style bathroom that Jawbreaker, Mudhoney and the crew share, it has a fairly clean, modern shower. But the toilet is lopsided and cracked and it looks like the room hasn't been cleaned in a year. I realize that despite the enormity of this event, it still ain't Poplar Creek.

When I come back into the room, I catch a glimpse of Nirvana's drummer heading out the door. The Nirvana bassist, Chris, is talking with Smear. I approach them with a copy of Panic Button, which Smear has already refused to look at, citing an aversion to "corporate bullshit". Smear, apparently, is always on.

Chris leafs through my mag and comments on the nice layout.

"I'm sick of photocopied zines," he says. "Everybody's doing it."

He asks for a copy to read and introduces himself. At the same moment, Cobain enters the room and stares me down for a second. I get the distinct feeling that he knows who I am and a slight shudder passes through me as I envision myself being beaten in an alley by members of the JAM security staff.

I break eye contact and concentrate on Chris, pointing out the fact that although he's only three years older than me, he makes about 75 times as much money. I may have hit a slight sore spot.

"Can we have a big discussion on materialism and the accumulation of wealth?" he says sarcastically. "It's all part of this consumer society..."

I hand him the recorder so he can continue his diatribe.

"I think this system here, this transaction-based, capitalist type market economy..."

I break in.

"You gonna be playing the hits tonight, like Jeremy?"

He gives me back the recorder and Smear fields the question.

"Oh yeah," he says, "all the hits, Jeremy, Even Flow..."

The baby has been waddling around the dressing room and now Cobain picks her up and takes her toward the window, about three stories up. He pretends to toss her out the window while singing loudly, "Would you know-ow my na-a-ame..."

I interrupt.

"Hi, I'm Ben."

"Hi Ben."

"I'm just looking for a scoop."

"A scoo-ooop."

Smear intervenes again. "You're barking up the wrong tree," he says.

I'm fully aware that there's a slightly paranoid attitude toward the press in the Nirvana camp these days. Earlier in the week, someone from USA Today had written something nasty about the band and was flatly denied entrance to the show. Tonight it was rumored that absolutely no press people were to be allowed backstage. Obviously, no one was taking me very seriously as a press man because I wasn't once questioned by the Nirvana entourage about my recorder, which by this point I was directing at people like a machine gun.

The baby reaches out for the recorder and Cobain encourages her.

"Throw it out the window," he says in his best talking-to-baby voice.

Cobain looks and speaks as if he's wacked out on smack. Having been in the presence of at least a few junkies in my life, I try to size up the situation and come up blank. I can't figure out if it's an act or not. The greasy hair, the 9 day growth, the putrid sweater he's wearing, the Jeff Spicoli vocal inflections...

He puts the baby down and gives me his full attention.

"Ben," he says. "Ben Weasel." He sounds as if he's greeting a long lost friend.

I'm kinda sweating now.

"Mmmm, no," I say. "Well, yeah, yes."

"Katie Smellie. Katy Odell."

"Are you an avid reader of Maximum Rock-N-Roll?" I ask.

"Avid," he answers. "The word avid."

"Do you read it a lot?"

"I used to." Now it appears he's gonna take me somewhat seriously. "Y'know, I kinda forgot it existed for a long time but every once in a while, yeah, I look through it."

"Do you like it?"

"I think... ummm.. I'm really happy about the fact that it will decompose within about ten years."

I make some comment about that very scenario being Yohannan's apparent goal, seeing as how he doesn't ever save the originals for any of the issues.

Cobain is now getting a little worked up.

"I can't have a comment on Maximum Rock-N-Roll, fuck that. I mean, those people hate our guts. I would hate our guts too if I was a fifteen year old kid who only listened to... or who only read Maximum Rock-N-Roll and only listened to punk rock bands."

"Were you ever that?"

"Yeah."

"And you felt that way?"

"Exactly. I was just as closed minded as those people."

I consider enlightening him about the fact that almost half the staff at MRR was writing about how great Nirvana was when "Nevermind" came out, but I realize that like so many other stars, this guy only reads the bad press. And I'm kinda shocked that he has such an obvious dislike for a magazine which in his world, doesn't mean shit. Somehow, someway, MRR's validation of his efforts (or lack thereof) matters. This amazes me.

The bass player interrupts our little session by informing the band that they have to go on stage.

We leave the dressing room and I reflect on Cobain's statements. The whole thing strikes me as being a little odd.

I've been told that the smack problems that he and his wife have had were made public knowledge by one of his own publicity people (in fact, supposedly by the same guy who used to work with Yohannan on MRR radio back in the old days). I ponder his appearance and style of speaking, and still have trouble deciding whether he's a perpetually stoned, developmentally arrested rock star or a fuck up like the rest of us who's scared to death of all the hype and publicity surrounding his band. It's obviously all thrown the guy into another world. His bandmates appear to be comfortable and at peace with their situation; Cobain is still begging the teacher for another five minutes to finish the test. He seems insecure as hell.

Just before Bill and I enter at stage right, we witness a shirtless kid, obviously fucked up out of his mind, being tossed out by the bouncers. Nirvana is still in the middle of their first song. The kid's pleading with them to let him stay. He pulls out a wad of bills and starts counting. "20, 40, 60, 80, 100." The security guys are chuckling. They take his money and he's allowed back in.

When Bill and I hit the stage, we immediately grab the M&M's from our pockets and begin whipping them at Smear, who plays along by attempting to catch them in his mouth while at the same time cranking out the hit single from the new Nirvana album.

Kurt Cobain is in another world. The rest of the band is jamming, occasionally smiling, having a good time. Not once during my observations from the side of the stage do I see Cobain make eye contact with his bandmates, let alone acknowledge their presence. The band is tight, but there are long, uncomfortable spaces between songs. Cobain is taking his sweet time, often heading over to the rack of over a dozen custom made left handed guitars to change instruments. The bassist tries to make some wise-cracks to the crowd and Kurt is not pleased. The crowd is oblivious; the band could do Dead Milkmen covers at this point and no one would notice.

Bill and I decide to bail out from our stage right position after a few songs; nothing's happening here and every time they start a new tune I could swear it was the one they just played. As we turn to leave the stage, two kids run up the ramp and barrel past us, diving into the crowd from the stage just like they've seen on MTV. When Bill and I open the backstage doors, we see that the offending stagedivers are in

the clutches of two huge JAM security men who are quite close to beating the living shit out of them; one of the kids landed on a fellow security man's head.

When the JAM guys see us, they turn, prepared to boot us as well. Once they see the passes, they attempt to bring us into their nasty little circle. They're both shouting a lecture-style denouncement of stage diving at the kids, pointing out the possible damage they could cause to people. They occasionally look at us as if we're supposed to nod in agreement. We're both silent, simply watching out to make sure the kids don't end up in the hospital. Finally, the offended security guard walks in and is asked if he wants to press charges.

"Goddamn right," he answers.

The kids, enjoying the effects of some type of drug or another, seem to have little idea of what's going on, and as they're led back through the crowd to be handed over to the cops, I get the feeling that they think they're being let back into the show.

At the end of Nirvana's set, the crowd is pissed off. Their heroes have refused to play "Smells Like Teen Spirit." Cobain reacts by diving off the stage into the crowd and promptly loses his shoes. No security guards threaten to have him arrested.

As the crowd piles onto the street, Bill and Blake stand in front of the club hawking t-shirts and CD's; to sell them inside the club would've meant that everything would've been priced at an obscene level. A cop attempts to harass Blake about selling the shirts. Blake waves him off and tells him he's in the band.

"Ok," says the cop, "but don't be a smart ass with me. I can still haul you in to jail."

The t-shirts are going like crazy. I get the feeling that these cretins would buy fresh dogshit if there was a nice sign on it. From deep in the crowd, I hear a loud scream. I can't make out the words. I hear it again, this time closer and clear as a bell.

"LEGALIZE IT!"

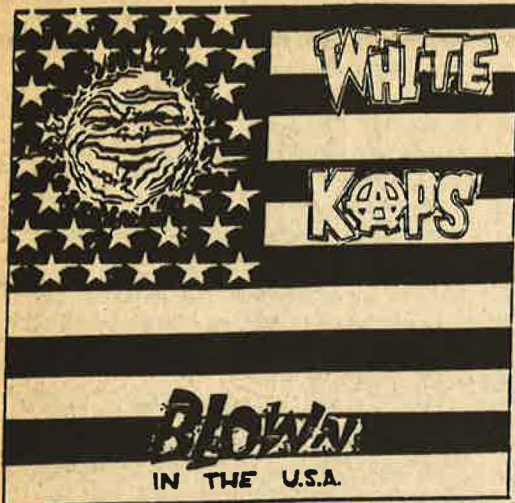
I hope he's talking about murder.

Before we head back home, Bill and Vapid plaster a couple of Screeching Weasel stickers on the back of the Wave Dancer and the Blue Mirage. The evening has been a success.

A few days later, Jim DeRegotas from the Sun-Times informs me that Cobain's junkie appearance that night was probably due to the fact that he had taken a sleeping pill earlier in the day. Still, I'm not surprised when, two months later, I see him on MTV Unplugged wearing the same ratty sweater, sporting the same greasy hair and 9 days growth and looking slightly spacey. Smear is still with the band, quiet and unobtrusive off to the left of the stage.

That Friday, my band plays Janesville, Wisconsin. The promoter had attended the Milwaukee Nirvana show that took place the night after their Chicago gig. He met up with Blake, who gave him a present to pass on to me. The promoter hands me a pack of Kools. Written on them in black marker is a message from Blake: SMOKE 'EM IF YOU GOT 'EM. Yes.

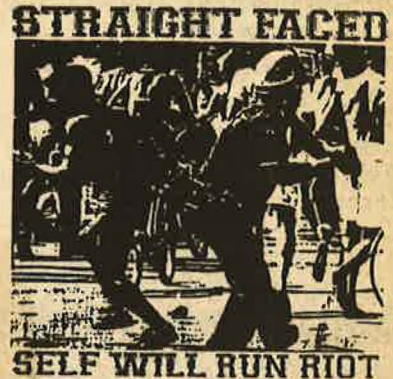
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DJ LEBOWITZ VS. THE NEW WAVE HIPPIES

by

Paul Keller

My daughter and I are big fans of DJ Lebowitz. If you haven't heard of him, he's a guy who does classic punk-rock songs on an acoustic piano! I heard his version of "Holiday in Cambodia" a few years back and enjoyed it, but we both sing along to his more recent 7", "Smoke, Suffer, and Die", which is very funny while being extremely caustic and somewhat stupid too. (Just like US!)

After narrowly missing him here and in San Francisco, we finally got the chance to catch him at the Bop Shop/No Palace space on Division Street. The show was billed as a benefit for "Food Not Bombs", ostensibly the food pantry subsidiary of the local anarchist cadre. The flyer said to bring \$3 and a can of food.

(A side note— I had stopped in a few nights earlier to get a flyer when I heard about the show. The guy working the door that night looked at me like I was crazy and he denied any knowledge of the show taking place until I showed him a flyer!)

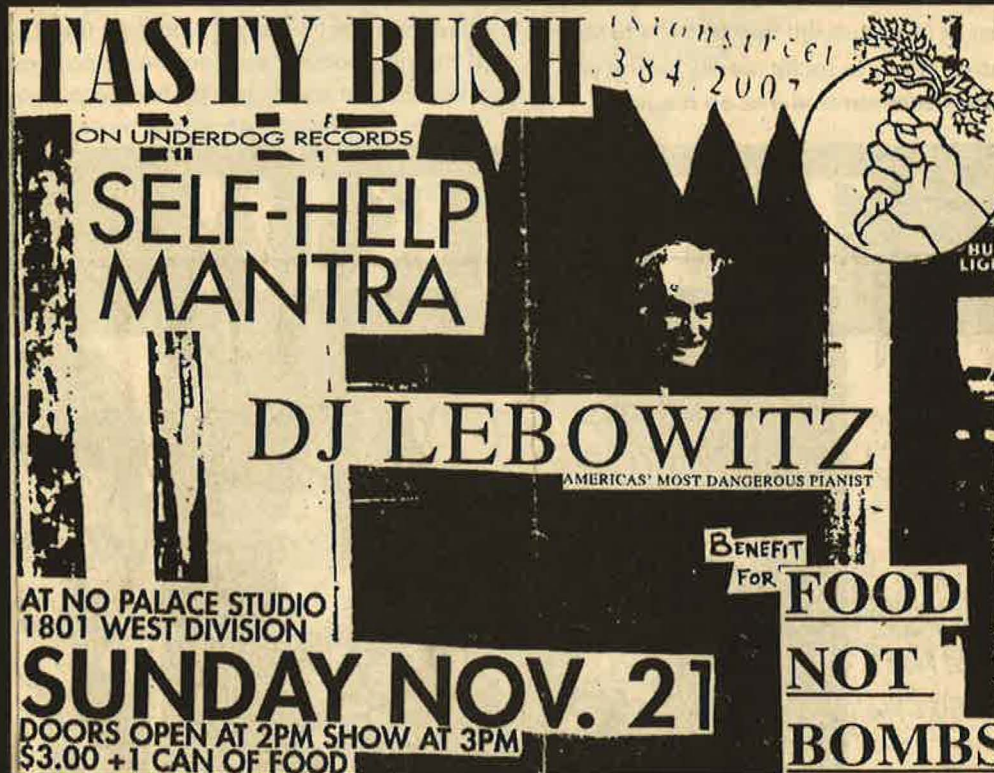
Let me do some scene-setting here. The space the anar-

chists use is usually a jazz club, and the owner lets them use it for free. Dogs were roaming around, as were some kids who seemed to have been dumped off at the place. One kid, a little girl with thick bifocals on, was covering her ears in pain while Self-Help Mantra was playing, and nobody came forward to get her some ear plugs or take

her out of the room. I later regretted not doing it myself — I had some in my car. Nobody was taking care of her. Nobody was looking after the dogs either — the bartender was surprised to find one pissing behind the bar! I guess making them piss outside would have been too oppressive in this autonomous zone. All day a familiar smell was clinging to the place but I

couldn't put my finger on it.

One of the musicians I was talking to pointed out that "Food Not Bombs are just feeding their own friends!" And he was right. This wasn't a pantry for feeding the "community", it was an anarchist pantry for feeding anarchists! I didn't really care myself — I suppose asking for food, not bombs leaves them more money for buying bombs later if they need to. This is in opposition to the



anarchist group "Bombs Not Food" where the admission is \$3 and a liter of gasoline with a Kotex™ taped to it.

But I digress. Anyway, when we came in, we saw this gorgeous Yamaha grand piano with about 29 coats of lacquer, a real gem. We were told that DJ would be playing it! We were expecting something like an old spinet with thumbtacks on the hammers, but no, he was going to play a real piano!

When he was setting up the piano, it was obvious he was awed by the instrument, too. One of the anarchist WYM-MINS came up to hook up the mike, and she got cigarette ashes in the piano, and DJ chastised her for her carelessness.

At last, he began to play. About four songs later, he was shut down. The owner of the place was worried about the piano's safety, and asked him to move into another room, on another piano. He was upset, but the slam wasn't on him, it was on the anarcho folks who took it upon themselves to use this expensive piano without getting permission.

While we were moving into the next room, I heard some muttering to the effect of "I wanna kill that bitch." For what? For using that expensive piano to make money so she can afford to have your dogs come in and piss on the floor?

We went into the smaller room, and DJ played some more, including the hilarious "French Toast Man", but I could not cope with the fact that the anarcho guys would not shut up during the entire set, and the ash-spilling WOOOMUN would not stop chain smoking her hand rolled pipe tobacco cigarettes at the table next to me. I don't mind some interaction between songs, but the guy doesn't have a Marshall stack, so let me hear him *during* the songs, OK? We left - fuck it! At these shows, I usually step out while Think? is playing, I don't stand around trying to drown him out.

It was then that I remembered where that smell came from. Dogshit, hand rolled cigs, a trace of pot, some patchouli... soiled diapers...HIPPIES. It was a smell of some hippie joints from the late 60's, early 70's! Or at least one variety. My favorite odor-memory of that era is a combination of cat shit, beer and pot! It permeated the wood in some of those houses. I think one could still smell it now.

Later on, I heard DJ was paid \$11 for the show. The guy comes all the way from San Francisco to be paid \$11 to perform in front of a bunch of rude hippies who feel wherever they are is the stage. My kind of town.

I like many of the bands who play these shows, but I get sick of hearing about bands not being paid even at well-attended ones. It's just a private club for these people, and I don't want to join. I won't go to any more anarchist shows.

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STRIKE THREE

Baseball, apple pie and Johnny Ramone

Ok, batter up, blah blah blah, here's

Johnny Ramone talkin' baseball.

J: Are you in New York?

B: No, Chicago.

J: I like Chicago. I'm a Cub Fan. I'm a Yankee fan, but in the National League, I'm a Cub fan.

B: What do you think about Turk Wendell?

J: Well, he'd be interesting, I just hope he develops his pitching. He was doing well in the minors, right. I mean, he's one of their high prospects and he'd really bring a lot of interest. He's like a Mark "The Bird" Fidrich type guy.

B: Well, they talk about basketball and football being so popular because of the stars they have but I don't think people like Barry Bonds are gonna do it for baseball.

J: No, the Cubs already sell out but it helps to have people that can draw crowds, like Fernando out in L.A. when he was in his prime.

B: That's the problem with the Cubs - they do sell out consistently so there's really no incentive to win here.

J: It's a great ballpark in a great location.

B: The Yankees did better than I thought they would this year.

J: Not better than I thought. When the season started and everyone was asking me what I thought, I said I thought they'd be in it 'til the end. I said, I don't think they can win because they had to make a lot of changes. It's hard to win when you make that many changes. It wasn't like fine-tuning or anything, they really revamped the whole team.

B: A lot of people thought Boggs would push them over the edge this year, and he did have a good year, right?

J: He had a decent year. I don't know what people expected of him. You know he's gonna hit .300 - he did about what I expected.

B: He's sorta known for not being a team player though...

J: Well, he has good work ethics, which is important. He has a high on-base percentage which in past years has been a problem with the team. Y'know, you don't lead to a lot of runs when you have a bunch of .280 hitters with .300 on-base percentages.

B: You still have Sanderson out there?

J: No, he went to the Giants at the end of the

season. You don't follow the

American League at all do you?

B: No. I'll tell ya, even with the White Sox, I mean I know the team and everything but I just can't get excited about it. I think it's the announcers. I mean at least you've got Phil Rizzuto...

J: Yeah, Rizzuto, Murcer, Tom Seaver.

B: We've got Tom Paciorek and Ken Harrelson.

J: Well, Harrelson's an interesting guy.

B: He's kind of a blowhard redneck and Paciorek sorta bows down to him so it's really the Hawk

Harrelson show. I'd rather lis-

ten to Harry Caray.

J: Oh yeah.

B: What do you

think about realignment?

J: I have sort of mixed feelings because I liked it the old, old way y'know where there were two leagues and eight teams in a league.

DRAWING: B-FACE

Expansion is really diluting the caliber of the play. But it's like that in all sports and I guess in some ways it'll keep more interest. More teams will be in it... It still hasn't gotten as bad as hockey and basketball.

Y'know there, unless you come in last place you make the playoffs.

B: I don't think it'll draw new people to the game. I mean, I'm upset about it because I like the idea that you have to be the best in your division to win...

J: Yeah.

B: ...And a lot of people pointed at San Francisco this year and said, "Well, they should have been in the playoffs." Well,

they didn't win it, they choked.

J: Yeah, I'd rather not see it. I'd rather see 'em cut back on a couple of teams, but that ain't gonna happen. I mean, if San Diego can't make enough to pay the salaries, then they should just dissolve. It's just too watered down. You really saw it in the World Series where you have the two best teams playing and they don't have any bullpen at all. Toronto had no middle relief, Philly had no middle relief or closers.

B: Yeah, the Sox and the Braves definitely had the edge in pitching and that's usually where you think of a winning team.

J: But the Braves had a bullpen problem, too. They have four great starters...

B: And Maddux just won the Cy Young again...

J: Yeah, I like the guy a lot.

B: Y'know I don't blame him for leaving Chicago. They treated him like shit.

And the reason he left is 'cause he knew they don't care about winning a World Series here. If they can fill the park...

J: I was shocked at first when he left. I thought he was the type who would stay. I guess they just said something that offended him.

B: And he wanted to play on a World Series team. But they do play around with the players, I mean, they did the same thing with Dawson - when he came to town, he signed a blank contract.

J: I remember that.

B: Renegotiation came up and they wanted to play games with him. The fans loved him, now they love him in Boston.

Anyway, what do you think the Cubs chances are now with realignment?

J: Well, they haven't made any changes towards getting any bet-

ter.

B: But they're gonna be in a division that'll be a lot easier.

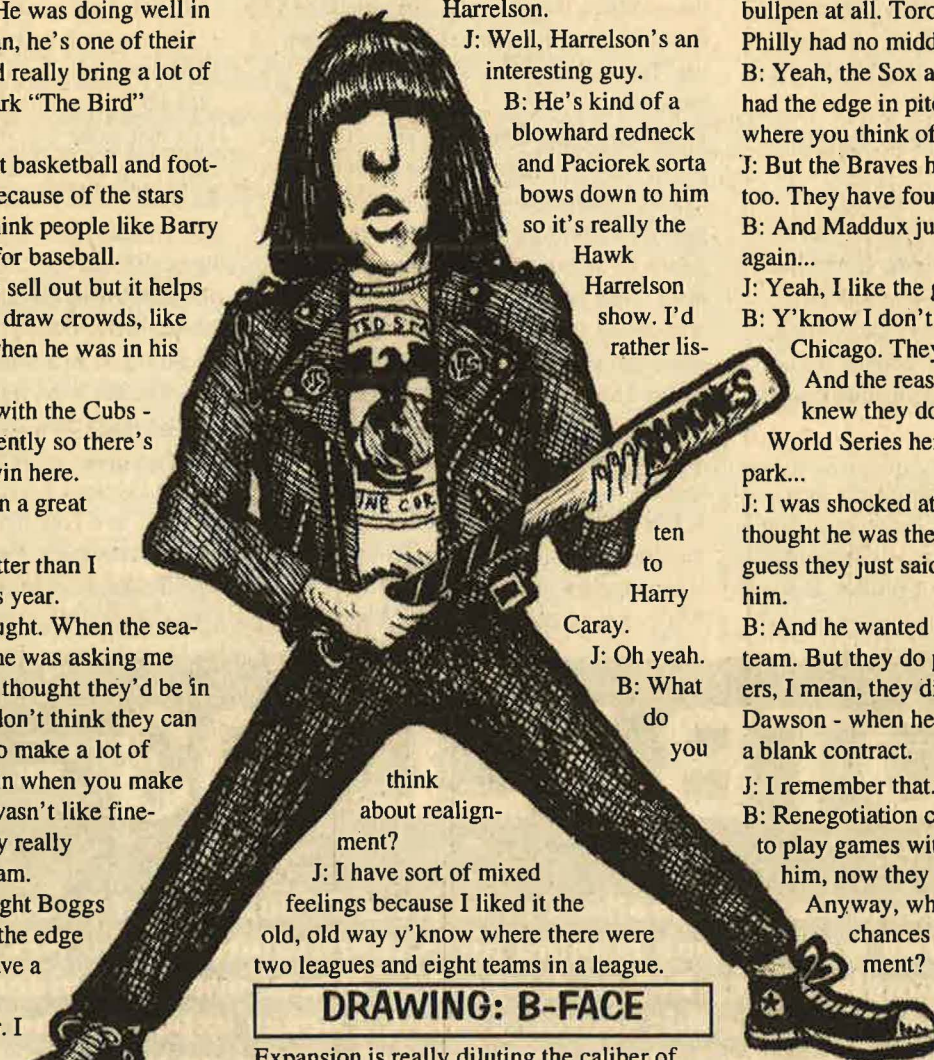
J: I haven't even looked at the realignment yet.

B: I think they're in with Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Cincinnati and one other...

J: That's a pretty watered-down division, I guess they could compete. Especially if they go out and get somebody. I'm sure they're looking for pitching, like everybody.

B: Are you familiar with Castillo?

J: Yeah.



B: What is this guy doing on a major league ballclub?

J: He was good the year before.

B: He blew a lot of games this year.

J: Yeah, I don't know what the problem was but he looked very good the year before. I expected him to pitch well and he didn't. I know he was horrible. He must've had a 5.00 era and some games he had trouble even getting the batter out.

B: A LOTTA games.

J: But he looked good the year before.

B: He did, and he has the change-up, but frankly, I'd rather see the Turk in the starting rotation. 'Cause even if he's struggling, let him grow into it 'cause Frank's days are over.

J: It's really early to give up on the guy, he's only 24 years old!

B: We're impatient here in Chicago.

J: Well, Sandberg had two injuries and he's had a tremendous career - if he comes back and plays like he normally plays and the Cubs get a pitcher, yeah, they can be in it.

B: But now we have Grace coming off a career year and they're talking about trading him.

J: I don't understand that.

B: I don't either - he's probably the best defensive first baseman in the league. And he consistently hits. Who are they gonna trade for? Even if they get a pitcher, it seriously damages their lineup.

J: I don't see it making sense either. He's not a power hitter but his defensive abilities and the fact that he's a .300 hitter year after year - I don't see it helping the team. He probably saves a lot of errors on the infielders.

B: Absolutely, he's a magnet.

J: You watch Frank Thomas out there, he's a disaster. I would not be voting for this guy for MVP. He's a one dimensional player - I'd be voting for Alomar. He's the best fielding second baseman in the AL, he's playing a hard position and if you look at the numbers, they're very comparable, other than the power numbers. Thomas is horrible. The worst fielding first baseman in baseball.

B: Alright, what about the Yankees?

J: They need to straighten out the bullpen, come up with a closer. They need to come up with a starting pitcher. I think they're gonna go all out and get the people they need. They probably need a lead-off hitter with speed, too. They didn't steal many bases last year, about 30 for the season.

Umm, I see them going out and getting what they need. They wanna win.

B: It's New York, they're gonna spend the money.

J: Well, they're not gonna get robbed and they're not gonna trade their whole minor league system just to get a player...

B: Do they have a good minor league?

J: Oh yeah. Really good - more prospects than any of the other teams. But there's been talk of Jack McDowell, Andy Benes, Randy Johnson, Ramon Martinez, a lotta names have been thrown around.

B: The Sox shouldn't play games with McDowell. Yeah, he had a tough time in the playoffs but he's a great pitcher.

J: The White Sox should keep him. I don't understand what they're doing, I mean, they have a lot of pitching prospects but you need an anchor to the staff.

B: How about Mitch Williams, another ex-Cub. What a disaster.

J: I know. I felt bad for the guy. He seems like an alright guy. I went to game five, drove down to Philadelphia and Schilling won that game 2-0. But as for Williams, I didn't see them putting him in at that point, he hadn't been pitching well.

B: I woulda liked to see Philly win, just because I hate Toronto.

J: Yeah, I hate Toronto. All over America, people were rooting for the Phillies.

B: So if you're a Yankees fan that means you hate the Mets right?

J: Oh yeah, I hate the Mets. That was the fun part of the season...

B: No kidding! I love watching them lose...

J: Yeah, as a Cub fan and a Yankee fan I doubly hate them. I'd like to see the Cubs and the Yankees in the World Series...

FOOTBALL '93 - '94

As you may have noticed, my football picks from #7 turned out to be a bad joke. This was primarily a case of me making picks (particularly in the NFC East) out of spite, prime examples being Dallas, Green Bay, Miami and the Raiders. But there were some surprises for me this season as well; I never expected the Giants to do anything, and the Jets, who I always like, actually came up with a pretty decent season as well. Well, I did pick half of the division winners correctly, but I suppose anyone who couldn't do that is hopeless anyway.

Ok, I'm going to press before the first playoff game, so I'm gonna go out on a limb here. L.A. will beat Denver, Kansas City will beat my beloved Steelers, Detroit will trounce Green Bay (no, this ain't my heart talkin' - trust me, Favre is gonna toss at least three interceptions) and New York will pound Minnesota. Our bye teams are San Francisco, Buffalo, Houston and Dallas and the smart money goes with Dallas and Houston in the Super Bowl. My NFC longshot fave for the big show is Detroit, for the AFC it's Kansas City. My call? Dallas and Buffalo. Who's gonna win? Who cares?

SHOCKING TIM HORTON!!!

OR

make that a cream-filled eclair...

A PANIC BUTTON SPORTS EXTRA!

In the last installment of Panic Button, I mused about the possible causes of the death of Tim Horton, a famous hockey player whose name is an important part of Canadian culture. Tim Horton's donut chains are among the finest in North America and I was happy as a clam when a friendly Canadian sent me some info on this legendary man.

As you may remember, I asked, "Was it a slow death? Car wreck? M.S.? AIDS? (Doubtful - no way would Canada honor a homo hockey player with a string of his own donut shops)."

Well, I discovered that Tim did indeed die in a car wreck. But my "homo" crack may not have been too far off the mark...

As I sometimes do, I've lost the name and address of the person who sent me the following information. Hopefully he will step forward and receive the Panic Button medal for quality investigative reporting. In the meantime, I quote from two separate book excerpts he sent me. The mysterious Canuck did not provide me with the titles of the books from which this information came, but I assure you it has been printed and published. Now, let's learn about Tim Horton:

"Miles Gilbert (Tim) Horton was born January 12, 1930 in Cochrane, Ontario.

He became an NHL player to stay in 1952 when he joined the Toronto Maple Leafs. A defenseman who shot righthanded, he stood 5'10", weighed 180 pounds and had strength few chose to challenge. He was to play almost 18 full seasons with Toronto, one each with the New York Rangers and Pittsburgh, and then two with Buffalo before a tragic accident ended his life on February 21, 1974.

He had a reputation as a peacemaker, flinging bodies out of piles during altercations and deterring over-eager opponents with a grasp known as the "Horton Bear Hug."

Tim played on four Stanley Cup winners with Toronto in the 1960s and was named six times to all-star teams: to the first team in 1964, 1968 and 1969, and to the second team in 1954, 1963 and 1967. He played 1,446 scheduled games with 115 goals, 403 assists and 1,611 penalty minutes. In 126 playoff games, Horton had 11 goals and 39 assists while drawing 183 minutes in penalties."

This next little tidbit comes from a more dubious source; it appears to have been photocopied from a book detailing the sexual proclivities of various hockey stars...

"NHL players are at least 90 per cent heterosexual, about the same as the general population. The league refuses to accept homosexuality as part of the human condition, to the despair of players who may prefer to nest with men.

Such players are the victims of sleazy whispering slander. One of them, high-scoring Stephane Richer of the Montreal Canadiens, felt compelled in the late winter of 1990 to announce that he is not homosexual. It is nobody's business if an adult cohabits with someone of the same sex, but in hockey the word 'gay' still means 'merry' and nothing else.

A has-been entertainer, Herbert Khaury from the Bronx, was once enamoured of the Toronto Maple Leafs, and particularly impressed with the late Tim Horton, the strongest player in the NHL between 1955 and 1970. Khaury's stage name is Tiny Tim. He is a stringbean boob who plays a toy ukelele and sings in the high falsetto of one whose genitals have been caught in a lawn mower.

Tiny Tim claimed, in a 1989 interview with Rita Zekas of the *Toronto Star*, that 'I knew Tim Horton of the Maple Leafs very well. Johnny Bower...Punch Imlach. When I was hot in the '60s, Punch wanted me to travel with the team to the end of the season. I was his good luck.'

Jim Dorey was a Toronto defenceman in the later 1960s, large and irreverent. Dorey insists that Tiny Tim visited the Leaf undressing room one night in the Great Western Forum in Los Angeles. Tiny Tim was wearing a Toronto jersey bearing Tim Horton's number, 7.

'You won't believe this,' Jim Dorey said, 'but I swear it's true. After the game we're all in the showers and, goddamnit, here came Tiny Tim. He took his clothes off and began to shower, too. I got the hell out of there when I saw he had an enormous erection.'"

While it seems hard to believe that in the late 60s, a Canadian hockey team would have allowed a naked and aroused Tiny Tim to leave their locker room unharmed, that's the story the way I got it. Was Horton queer? That's a secret he took to his grave.

Tim Horton died in a car crash 20 years ago this February. A superstar of hockey and a friend (at least) to Tiny Tim, his name will live on for generations not only in the record books, but in the hearts and minds of hungry Canadians everywhere.

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The Son of the Section Without A Title

That's All About Movies...

In which we discuss a few rad mainstream horror flicks and your editor issues the warning to you to not even bother writing to me about other great mainstream horror flicks (I know there's plenty more but these are ones I think are particularly noteworthy) or great underground horror flicks, which I may cover some other time. Amen.

I saw **LEATHERFACE - The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3** when it came out and I remember being impressed by the look of the film but a little disappointed with the contents. After recently seeing it again on video, I have to change my opinion slightly. The film is definitely vapid, but then again, that's the way it's supposed to be. Except for the noticeable lack of gore, this is a class A horror film.

I was shocked at how many of the scenes had been embedded in my memory; the young couple hitting the armadillo on the road in the film's beginning; the perfect white trash ambience of the Sawyer home (like Dogpatch gone bad complete with human skeletons strewn carelessly amidst the homey, country house); the naivete of the murderous **LEATHERFACE** who can't figure out why his computer learning tool keeps telling him he's wrong when he identifies a picture of a clown as **FOOD**.

The sheer pointlessness of the movie is its exact point. It is a bare bones exercise in **SCARING THE SHIT OUT OF YOU**, and though it mostly falls at that, the movie looks and feels so good it doesn't really matter. The spirit of the original *Massacre* is captured, unlike its sequel which relied on the old Troma technique of trying too hard to be funny. **LEATHERFACE** is funny because it takes itself seriously, but not to the point of self conscious camp (Troma doesn't seem to understand that the H.G. Lewis flicks were hilarious because they took themselves seriously, not because Lewis hired reject scriptwriters from *Who's The Boss* to piece together wacky plots). The characters are believable (considering the genre of course), not goofy cliches that bite it after being accosted by wisecracking mass murderers. Sure, there's plenty of funny stuff here, but it doesn't go overboard. The gas station man, for instance, is humorous, but ultimately frightening as hell, NOT because he makes a crack and then pulls out a knife, but because he's so obviously mentally disturbed - and happy as a clam. No self esteem problems with this fella.

The photography and lighting are excellent. The director creates a white trash hell from which there is no escape. A well lit, comfortable looking house in the middle of the woods that six (or seven, if you count the quickly decaying grandpa) perfectly rational lunatics occupy. A monster truck driven by a monster man - when those lights flash on, you better run like hell. The brand new chainsaw given to **Leatherface**, impossibly huge and gleaming like a nice set of silver, complete with inscription - **THE SAW IS FAMILY**.

Yes, I wish it was gorier. I wish the holes in the plot had been patched up before shooting. But aside from that, this movie is a pretty tasty nightmare. Check it out.

Out of all of George Romero's zombie films, **DAWN OF THE DEAD** is my favorite. Besides being the goriest, it's also the funniest and, much more than the original or the third in the series, **DAY OF THE DEAD**, the best at depicting a world largely decimated by the walking dead in which living, breathing humans are a minority and must battle flesh eating mutants like so many pesky ants.

The film takes place almost entirely inside a shopping mall. That's it for me right there. Set a movie in a deserted shopping mall, in a courtroom or on a train and you've already got me hooked. The zombies have taken over the mall and a group of humans (who apparently work for some military group or government agency) become trapped inside with them. The only way to kill the zombies is with a bullet (or an adequate substitute) through the brain. The result is a non-stop onslaught of gore. Running, shooting, struggling - that's it. Romero makes some nice, subtle comments about mainstream America (zombies stumbling down escalators while Muzak plays in the background - Hare Krishna zombies, biker zombies) but the main event here is **KILLING THE FUCKING ZOMBIES!!!**

The film is uncompromising in its pursuit of the ultimate gross out and for that alone it should be commended. It also has a great feel, which is something that most horror directors don't even consider. My girlfriend, who has watched far gorier films, can't stomach this one. I guess it's because, although there have been sicker movies made, this one literally never lets up; you don't have a chance to catch your breath before another zombie stumbles across the screen. We cheer when one of the heroes just barely makes it behind a sliding glass door into a store, and we cheer louder when he stuffs a screwdriver into one of the zombie's ears. But by the end of the film, we almost feel sorry for the zombies. Once you know how to handle them properly, they look more pathetic and sad than scary. They're like crazed animals who just want something to eat. Our heroes just don't wanna be the main course.

RE-ANIMATOR is another cool horror film with a superb sense of style. Like all great horror flicks, the preliminaries last as long as it takes you to grab a beer from the fridge before the gore kicks in. The film was made by Stuart Gordon, who had already made a neat little movie called **DOLLS** (in which an obnoxious punker and her friends get stranded by the side of the road on a dark, rainy night and end up inside the home of a friendly elderly couple who have a large collection of dolls. Punk #1 decides to start swiping stuff and you know the dolls don't like that at all...). The movie is not scary - unless you're frightened by dolls coming to life - but it's quite entertaining.

With **RE-ANIMATOR**, Gordon dips into the vault of the previously underrated (and long dead) H.P. Lovecraft for his storyline. Over at Miskatonic U. in Rhode Island, a medical student advertises for a roommate. He ends up with another med student, Herbert West, who is

convinced that the brain remains active much longer than commonly believed after death. West is an arrogant little dweeb, but you can't help liking him. He has created a drug which he believes will bring the dead back to life if injected quickly enough after death. His roommate, Dan, becomes entangled in Herbert's wacky plot and we're off. West starts by killing Dan's cat and bringing the thing back to life. The only problem is, once the dead come back to life, they're filled with an uncontrollable rage. The cat, even with a broken spine, goes fucking ballistic in the basement.

Dan is dating the dean's daughter, which doesn't endear him to the dean once the cat is outta the bag, so to speak. West's nemesis is a doctor who greatly resents West's arrogance; HE'S the only one with the right to be arrogant around here. The excellent camera work and creepy music works perfectly with the plot; this really is a movie that keeps you "on the edge of your seat." Jeffrey Combs' performance as Herbert West is brilliant; half the time you wanna scream at him for being such a nutcase and the other half, you're hoping he gets away with his bizarre plot.

Though I own the unrated version of this film, there are to my knowledge at least two other versions floating around. In one of the other versions, a lot of the gore is cut out, but a couple of great scenes are added, such as West's nemesis hypnotizing the dean and then convincing him to kick Dan out of school - Dan is dating the dean's daughter after all and the doctor wants her for himself. The other cool scene shows Dan breaking into West's bedroom to find him injecting the re-animating fluid into his own forearm.

Those scenes are brilliant and it's a shame they're deleted from the

unrated version - especially since without the inclusion of the hypnotizing scene, we haven't the slightest clue what motivates the dean to kick Dan out of school, or how he has found out that Dan's schtupping his daughter. That aside, I have to recommend the unrated version because the most important thing about the movie is its gory excess. What I don't recommend is the sequel, *BRIDE OF RE-ANIMATOR*, which is worthwhile only for Combs' performance (Gordon had nothing to do with the film) or *ROBOTJOX*, a ridiculous movie that Gordon made after he was done bringing Lovecraft's stories to the screen. I do, however, highly recommend another Gordon film based on another Lovecraft story called *FROM BEYOND*. Again, it stars Jeffrey Combs and it has the same sort of twisted humor and stomach churning gore as *RE-ANIMATOR*.

Other mainstream horror movies with a style all their own worth mentioning are the brilliant *RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD* (which has nothing to do with Romero besides stealing his idea - which it happily admits) starring, among others, the beautiful Linnea Quigley (*SORORITY BABES IN THE SLIMEBALL BOWL-O-RAMA* and *CHAINSAW HOOKERS*); check out her naked dance on top of a tombstone. The movie drags near the end, but it's still a qualitative zombie flick (avoid the sequel at all costs). Also, check out *RETURN TO HORROR HIGH* (a confusing and pointless film that nonetheless has a great, creepy feel; witness Marla Brady as a cop covered in blood chowing down on a chill dog) and *NEAR DARK*, a harmless yet beautifully filmed vampire story that was swiped by the makers of the completely worthless *THE LOST BOYS*. That oughta keep ya busy for a while.



IT WAS THE SUMMER OF '82
AND I WAS A HIGH SCHOOL
LOSER DESTINED TO HAVE
MY HEART SLAMMED IN THE
THRASH-PIT OF LOVE!! IT
WAS TO BE A...

True Punk Romance

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Ace Backwords

SHE WAS THE GIRL OF MY DREAMS...
BUT, ALAS, OUR HEARTS DID NOT
BEAT TO THE SAME 7-INCHER!!

JOHNNY...YOU'RE NOTHING
BUT A POSEUR!!
GOOD-BYE!!
FOREVER!!

"Sob"



I WANDERED THE
STREETS, A LONELY
AND DEFEATED
MAN... UNTIL
THAT FATEFUL
DAY WHEN I
HEARD THOSE
WORDS THAT
WOULD
FOREVER
CHANGE
MY
IMAGE!!

HEY DWEBB...DON'T
BE A LOSER ALL YOUR
LIFE!! GET SOME NEW
THREADS AND CHECK OUT
THE CIRCLE JERKS GIG
AT THE ON BROADWAY!!



THAT DUDE WAS RIGHT!!
I DECIDED TO "GO PUNK"
...WITH AWESOME RESULTS!!

MAN OH MAN!! NOW I'M
LIKE A CRUCIAL MEMBER
OF THE SCENE, MAN!!



BEFORE I KNEW IT, I WAS THE MAN!!
KEEP YOUR MITTS OFFA' MY
WOMAN YOU NEW-WAVE
PANTY-WAIST!!

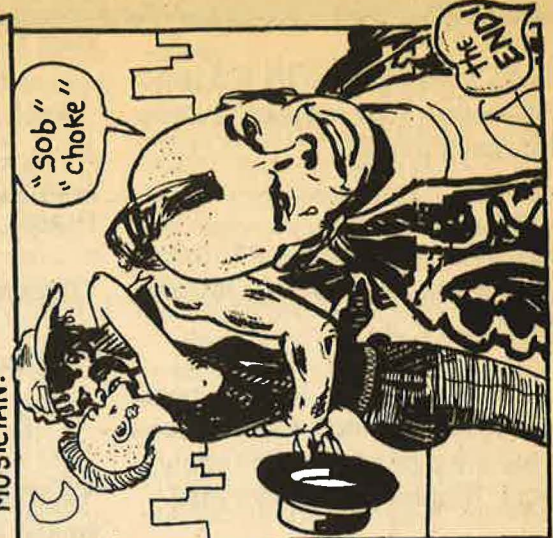
GOSH, JOHNNY!
YOU REALLY ARE A
HARDCORE MOTHER-
FUCKER AFTER
ALL!!

"gasp!"



AND WE LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER
UNTIL PUNK WENT OUT OF FASHION
AND SHE DUMPED ME FOR A RAP
MUSICIAN.

"Sob"
"choke"



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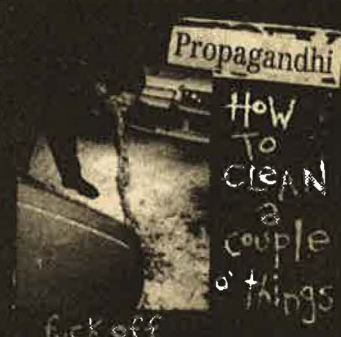
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On weekends we had to be at the theater an hour before opening to get ready for the masses. Often I'd see the cleaning crew finishing up their janitorial work. One morning, I heard the head of the "crew" (he and his wife) complaining about the work load. His wife was pregnant and had to take a job behind the candy counter at the theater. She had been working with us for a couple of weeks and was fairly pleasant aside from her annoying habit of calling her goddamn husband every five minutes. She was also pretty good at escaping shitty jobs, but I guess we all were.

On this particular morning, Dwight was bitching aloud about the fact that his wife had to work with him all night and now she had to go work behind the candy counter for six hours. He needed to hire somebody.

Later that day I grilled Mary about the job. It was pretty simple, she told me. Sunday through Thursday was a real breeze; Dwight had contracts with our two screen theater and a four screen theater

after Rocky Horror a thorough cleansing was necessary. The one theater took about three hours to clean. We moved to the other one which went much faster and then Dwight took me over to the supply closet.

"Me and the manager are the only ones with keys to this closet," he said gravely. "If you need anything from the closet, ask ME. I will come and open it for you." Dwight, cleaner of movie theaters and holder of the key, was clearly proud of his position.

We moved on to the men's bathroom. Here, the toilets were scrubbed out, the mirrors cleaned, the floor swept and mopped and the trash emptied. Simple and painless. When we hit the ladies crapper, Dwight pointed me over to a metal box screwed onto the side of the stall partition.

"You gotta clean out the rag box every day," he said.

It was about eight in the morning. I was tired and slightly brain dead, but not so much that I didn't approach the shiny

change.

"Any money we find, we split," he said sternly.

Ok. I'd been picking up loose change all night but I figure that I'd earned it before this rule was brought to my attention so I saw no need to share.

By 11:30 we were back at the first theater. Mary was sitting on the cushy lobby bench. Dwight and I hustled to put the cleaning supplies away and we left just as the theater employees were arriving.

It only took a few days for Dwight to leave me on my own. His wife stopped helping with the cleaning and we worked on different parts of the theaters, which left me a lot of time for daydreaming. I was usually waiting at the theater when Dwight showed up, his massive key chain dangling from his skinny hips. He looked to be about my age and was in fact only a couple of years older than me. He was from Wisconsin, which explained his marrying at such a young age. His appearance was that of a goofy high school kid and no matter how hard he tried to look

jobs i've hated

chapter two in the soon-to-be-published account of your editor's hapless attempts to find a niche in the working world

up in Deerfield and those took four or five hours total. The real work came on the weekends. The theaters were more packed, therefore more messy, plus we had the distinction of showing the Rocky Horror flick Fridays and Saturdays at our theater. Still, the job sounded simple - cleaning the theaters, bathrooms and lobby. Not a lotta heavy brain work involved. I told her I'd work for Dwight. She immediately called him and he agreed to pay me five bucks an hour under the table. I had to start that night.

I finished my shift at 6:00 and went home and watched TV until my other job started. I showed up at the theater at 2:30 A.M. Dwight was there with his wife pulling a couple of leaf blowers and a vacuum cleaner from the trunk of his car.

We started off by hitting the room that had been subjected to Rocky Horror. Big rolls of wet toilet paper, chunks of toast and squirt bottles had to be picked up and tossed in the rolling trash barrel. Then we each got a leaf blower running and, starting at the back of the theater, blew the trash to the front of the theater, walking slowly between rows of seats. The trash at the front of the theater was piled up and deposited in the barrel, then we mopped. Normally we would only spot mop, but

metal box with a certain degree of apprehension.

I inserted the key into the lock and opened the box. Yes indeed, it was a rag box in the truest sense of the word. I would've sold my ass for a pair of rubber gloves. Instead, I settled for a big wad of toilet paper, using it to pull the offending tampons out of the box. Some were stuck to the sides and I had to push and pull to scrape them off. I felt a vague urge to vomit. I cleaned two more rag boxes while Dwight stood by chuckling. Apparently he saw the situation as being a form of custodial hazing.

The bathrooms cleaned, Dwight ushered me around emptying the trash. We tossed it all in the dumpster on the side of the building and headed off for the other theater while his wife stayed on to vacuum the lobby.

The other theater was more of the same. It actually wasn't quite as bad; there were four screens, but the rooms were much smaller and there was no Rocky Horror. The lobby was smaller, but the bathrooms were bigger, particularly the men's. Still, the job only took a few hours.

While we were in the last theater, I found a five dollar bill on the floor. Dwight quickly grabbed it and gave me \$2.50

the part, he just didn't exude a janitorial air.

But he was a little prick. Having someone to boss around obviously brought him great joy and when he saw I was a good, fast worker, he immediately began taking advantage of all the wonderful opportunities.

Dwight liked to start early so on weekdays we were at the first theater by 7:30. Since the theaters were far less populated during the week, we were usually done by noon. At first, the only key I was even allowed to touch was the one for the rag box. But soon he started leaving me at the theater alone with the keys to the lobby doors and supply closets, claiming he had to take his wife to the doctor. Within a couple of weeks she was going to the doctor just about every day. Now I knew damn well that Dwight was grossing \$800 a week for cleaning both theaters, and he was paying me about \$250 a week under the table so he was turning a tidy profit while I did most of the work. I also knew damn well that, pregnant or not, the sonofabitch didn't have to take his wife to the doctor every other day. In fact, he was simply showing up, handing me the keys and - of this I became certain - going back home to bed.

The pattern developed to the point where I was cleaning the first theater entirely by myself, then Dwight would show up and we'd head off to the second theater which was always a breeze. Mary would still sometimes help on the weekends but more often than not, I was left to clean up after the Rocky Horror creeps by myself.

Though I realized I was getting the short end of the stick, I never complained. I much preferred being left alone to do my work and instead of Dwight nagging me about shit WHILE I was working, he'd come in after I finished and get all flustered about things I hadn't done according to his strict custodial guidelines.

On my own, I rather enjoyed cranking up the leaf blower and effortlessly pushing the empty popcorn buckets and soda cups and crushed Raisenets down to the front of the screen. Since Dwight was rarely around to check that I'd done a thorough mopping (which was mandatory once a week), I stuck with spot mopping; by the time he showed up everything was already dry so he really had no way of knowing whether I'd done the unnecessary job or not. Since the house lights in the theater were quite dim, I'd occasionally forgo the mopping for a nice, long cigarette break, secure in the knowledge that no matter how hard the little prick looked, it would be tough for him to find a spot I missed. He usually found something anyway, but hey, I was just a dim-witted janitor's assistant.

I played dumb from the get-go. Though Dwight was intellectually challenged, if not impaired, I still managed to act more stupid than him. I quickly became aware of his image of me; a not-too-bright stooge, but a hard worker - a guy who tries but just can't help occasionally forgetting to clean the mirrors or scrape out the rag boxes.

Also, on my own I was able to net a nice little pocketful of tips every day, courtesy of sloppy theater patrons. Mostly I found change, but a few days a week I'd hit a crumpled pile of small bills or a stray ten spot. Once, when Dwight was cleaning in the theater next to me up in Deerfield, I found a wallet. I opened it up and discovered a \$100 bill inside. I quickly pocketed the dough and stashed the wallet under the seat. When Dwight found it the next day, he was disappointed indeed to find that it contained no cash. "What we find, we split" was just bullshit. Dwight never once gave me a dime and after my first day, I never gave him anything either. I started coming to work with loose change in my pocket so he couldn't accuse me of holding out. Every once in a while he'd ask, but I always gave him the good ol'

bewildered look. Sorry, Dwight, I guess I'm just not a lucky guy...

The theater in Deerfield was patronized by the wealthy people of that area, so silver and green fringe benefits were much more common there. So, for some reason, were empty beer bottles. Every day I'd end up with a case of empties in my trash barrel. Occasionally I'd run across a couple of unopened beers, warm yet invariably of a higher quality than I was used to:



St. Pauli Girl, Heineken, Beck's. It was tough to smuggle those out so I always ended up sharing...

So here I was working seven days a week as a janitor and four more days a week as a theater employee in addition to going to school four nights a week. Everyone at the theater had to work one weekend night and one weekend day. Therefore, every Saturday and Sunday I was faced with fourteen hour days, my only consolation being money, which at that point in my life was still enough to keep me going.

With little spare time, I spent most of my days as a janitor coming up with goofy songs - at one point, I was on the verge of creating a Janitor's opera, a concept album of sorts. After further reflection, I decided it was a really dumb idea. I did have a wonderful little song about people who don't flush after taking a crap in a public toilet (I referred to rag boxes in the bridge), but not being particularly conscientious, I never put the words to paper and they became forever lost amongst the cobwebs of my brain.

My career as a janitor came to a close due to several factors. First, the Corporate President in Charge of Making Employees' Lives Miserable decided that all the scuff marks on the backs of the seats had to be cleaned more frequently than Dwight was doing it. Now once a week I had to scrub the hell out of all the seats with a rag and a bottle of semi-toxic acidic fluid. Instead of ending my Wednesday at noon, I was stuck there until three. If that wasn't bad enough, Dwight, fully realizing the potential to uti-

lize me in order to further his brown nosing, stepped up his gum scraping efforts. The result was me sitting on the floor of a dim theater with a putty knife attempting to chip petrified gum and soda deposits off the cement floor. This was getting ridiculous. I was already doing more than half the work, and now this butthole was getting further up the boss's bottom at my expense.

I began to be more careful about emptying my cigarette butts into the garbage so that Dwight would never know how much time I spent laying down on the lobby benches thinking about more important things than toilets and dirty mops. I began spending so much goddamn time just sitting around that I seemed to be working much slower. Dwight tried to bust me several times by popping in unexpectedly while I lounged on the bench. However, there was a small space between the curtains which provided me with the perfect vista for spotting Dwight's car zipping across the empty mall parking lot a good two minutes before he was in the door. He almost caught me one late morning by taking a different route; he came from the opposite direction, around the corner. Unfortunately for him, he had come too late; I had finished everything but the vacuuming. When he walked in I was sitting on the couch finishing my cigarette. He looked triumphant.

"How much more is there to do?" he asked, glancing at his watch.

"Just the vacuuming," I said. He kept the vacuum cleaner in the trunk of his car.

His victory cruelly snatched away, he went outside, grabbed the vacuum and ran it furiously over the carpet.

After that, he started getting snippy with me, which just made me slack off even more. I finally gave him two weeks notice, a process I'm not fond of, but one that I knew would be best considering I'd be running into him on weekends when I was working the door or the candy counter. After I quit, he made one snide comment about my inability to handle tough work, but I just laughed like he had hit upon one of the great truths in life.

A few months later he moved back up to Wisconsin where he'd gotten a couple of cleaning contracts. The cheeseheads always end up going back to the land of the dead. When I heard the contracts were open I briefly considered trying to get them, but I was leery of working seven days a week, 365 days a year for one of the stingiest, nastiest corporations to ever exist. Before I had a chance to make up my mind, they hired a couple of Polish ladies. Just as well. I woulda fucked the whole thing up anyway.

Music Can Make You Vomit!!!

Ok, once again I've stuck a major label release in here. Sorry, but I gotta be honest with ya - it's more punk rock than most of the records I got for review. Also, I don't review cassettes, CD's that are available on vinyl or records that are so awful that I can't think up anything to say about them. Ok. Shall we begin?

BACK OF DAVE - EP (Better Days Records)
Stupid fucking boring straight rock.

BIKINI KILL - New Radio EP (Kill Rock Stars/ 120 N.E. State St #418/ Olympia WA/ 98501)



A three song EP. Two of 'em are butt-kickin', mid-tempo punk rock anthems ("Rebel Girl" is like AC/DC gone punk, fuck yes). The other tune is sortofa throwaway called "Demirep", but just ignore that and play the other two at maximum volume. Joan Jett had something to do with this but the credits don't make clear exactly what that something was...

BIKINI KILL - Pussywhipped LP (Kill Rock Stars)

A major disappointment after their last single. The only tune on here with the straight-forward punk blast of the EP is a tune that's on the EP. The guitarist does some interesting stuff but it ain't enough to carry the record. This has more in common with the post-hardcore noise bands of the mid-eighties than it does with good ol' punk.

BORN AGAINST - Battle Hymns Of The Race War 10" EP (Vermiform Records/ P.O. Box 12065/ Richmond VA/ 23241)

The last gasp for the now-defunct band that rejuvenated East coast punk hardcore. As usual, the lyrics are P.C. without being pious or smarmy. "Footbound and Hobbled" is the best track here, heavy, noisy and painful, representing the direction B.A. was headed in before their break up. My only problem with this is that I really wish their final line-up had played on it...

COLAVISION EP (\$3.00 to Rinso/ P.O. Box 3411/ Dayton OH/ 45401)

Quirky, snotty punk that really hits the spot - this is the best debut record I've heard in a year. Good production, nice hand painted-on-tin-foil covers... One of the few total low-budget D.I.Y. releases that doesn't fit that category just 'cause it sucks. It ain't perfect but it is pretty original; references to other bands are pointless. The headline is: Bored Dayton Brains Crank Out Great Midwest Punk. This is fucking rad. Go ahead and spend a few bucks on it.

CRISIS UNDER CONTROL - View Of the Few EP (Standfast Records/ P.O. Box 973/ Lilburn GA/ 30226)

A mid-eighties hardcore influence dominates here. You'll like it if you're into those shouted group backups and fast-slow-fast songs. It doesn't really do anything for me, in fact it seems pretty nostalgic.

DEAD TREE - EP (Theologian Records/ 120 Pier Av/ Hermosa Beach CA/ 90254)

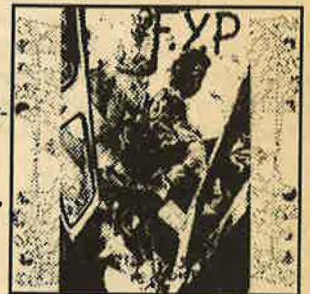
A so-so EP that's more rock than punk. It's one of those records that you wanna say more about but since it seems like such a self-indulgent project, you wind up deciding it ain't worth bustin' out the thesauras.

D.O.A. - Loggerheads LP (Alternative Tentacles/ P.O. Box 419092/ San Francisco CA/ 94141)

While I wish nothing but the best for Mr. Shithead and Co., it's clear by now that D.O.A.'s glory days are over. Oh, they can still write a great tune and for fanatics, "You Little Weiner", "Overtime", "That Turbulent Uneasy Feeling" and "Knots" rank with some of their best stuff ever. Unfortunately, a good deal of this sticks with the straight rock feel of "Murder" and "True North Strong and Free", a territory D.O.A. seems comfortable with but one that I just can't relate to. Knowing what these fellows are capable of, I kinda wish they'd just break up D.O.A., get some fresh blood and start making records with the intensity and passion that they had ten years ago.

F.Y.P. - My Nieghbores Is Stoopid EP (K Records/ Box 7154/ Olympia WA/ 98507)

More spazzosity from the current kings of geek-core. They've cornered the market on songs and artwork from the perspective of a five year old. They usually play too fast to keep up with each other, and the music is childish/retarded yet it's all somehow completely satisfying.



GLUEGUN - EP (Fearless Records/ 20710 Manhattan Place/ Suite 132/ Torrance CA/ 90501)

Veers from tight-as-hell melodic hardcore to almost-straight metal to pure punk rock, as best evidenced on "Eva's Got a Mohawk" (womyn will not be overjoyed). It's definitely catchy and is worth checking out.

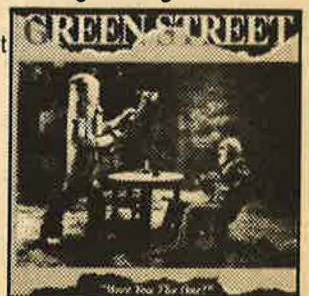


GREEN DAY - Dookie CD (Warner Bros.)

Isn't it ironic that Green Day's major label debut is their best album yet... The songs are shorter, faster and heavier and there's an absolute minimum of instrumental fucking around. They've finally perfected their lyrical subject matter; I defy anyone to find a band who's more on target than Green Day when it comes to singing about that barren wasteland of life between highschool and full-fledged adulthood. Check out "Longview" and "Coming Clean" for validation. This is more "punk" than their first two albums ("Basket Case" and "In The End" are definitely not your average Green Day songs. Or they weren't), so I don't know if they'll find mass commercial success but there's no question that they're definitely not pandering to the mainstream.

GREEN STREET - Were You the One? EP (Cold Grey Matter Records/ P.O. Box 578539/ Chicago IL/ 60657-8539)

Two above average pop-punk songs, the stronger being the A side cut. The frustrating part is that their singer is just bad. I mean, he really can't sing at all so the songs are basically rendered unlistenable. It's kinda a shame, they could be a great band.



THE HANSON BROTHERS - Gross Misconduct LP (Alternative Tentacles)
NOMEANSNO does a full-fledged take off on the Ramones that ultimately

sounds more inspired by early eighties hardcore punk. Intentions aside, this is a fucking outstanding album which is why I'm reviewing it long after its release. This is the kinda stuff that made me fall in love with punk rock in the first place and it's taken up almost permanent residence on my turntable. Comes with an extra three song EP. If you don't own it yet, get movin'.

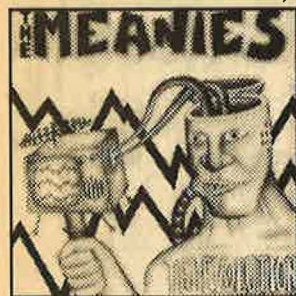
JAWBREAKER - 24 Hour Revenge Therapy LP
(Tupelo/Communion)

This is easily the most consistent and complete of Jawbreaker's albums. The production is excellent and there are at least four tunes on here that are bound to have audiences all over the country singing along. Schwarzenbach pulls off more incredible lyrics and the band is playing tighter and fucking around on their instruments a lot less. I guess a lot of this album sounds depressing, but to me it's the same kind of depression that you feel reading "Catcher In The Rye" or watching a movie like "Midnight Cowboy"; it's sorta like a perversely satisfying misery. There are a couple of tunes on here reflecting Blake's disillusionment with the punk scene, and a couple more with specific references to Jawbreaker's home turf, which is something I always like to see bands doing. Then you've got the perfect singalong ("Boxcar"), the perfect love song ("Jinx Removing", in which Blake sings, "I love you more than I ever loved anyone before" and gets away with it) and what might be the pop punk anthem of the year, "The Boat Dreams From The Hill". It's a fantastic album and one that should have Jawbreaker's name on everybody's lips this year.

THE LARRY BRRRDS - Eastown EP (\$3.00 to Impatient Records/ 4636 Meadowview Dr/ Lima OH/ 45805)

Sounds like an even less slick version of Crimpshrine. Take away the second boring song and you're left with a pretty cool single which ain't no easy task if you come from Ohio. Features David Draino from Colavision.

THE MEANIES - Teleolution CD (Empty Records/ P.O. Box 12034/ Seattle WA/ 98102)



Sortofa "greatest hits" compilation showcasing Australia's best pop punk band. Though this could've benefitted from better sequencing, it's still a necessity. Loud guitars, a high energy rhythm section and two styles of songwriting - straight up punk and straight up melodic. A definite yes.

THE MONOMEN - Shut The Fuck Up! 10" (Estrus Records/ P.O. Box 2125/

Bellingham WA/ 98227-2125)

An all instrumental recording that somehow manages to remain listenable after repeated spins. Certain images pop up here: The Ventures of course, some goof yelling "Surf's Up!" in a sixties beach movie, a bunch of sweaty guys banging out rock and roll in a hot garage guzzling piss warm beer, etc. Could fit in perfectly on the "Multiple Maniacs" soundtrack. Act now and get the limited edition jacket with the tits.

MOTHERFIST - All The Lessons EP (Fearless Records)

Pretty decent punk/hardcore stuff. Good songwriting and excellent production. Not bad for what I assume is a first release, though I could do without the excessive guitar wanking.

MOTHER'S DAY - If I Only Had A Brain CD (Project A Bomb/ P.O. Box 4233 Industrial Station/ St. Paul Mn/ 55104)

First of all, this fucking thing has 36 tracks and runs just under 56 minutes. Secondly, the band tries way too hard to be zany. Thirdly, they attempt just about every musical style known to mankind (including a couple of admittedly decent hardcore tunes). A nice guy would say this is eclectic. Well, I'm not a nice guy and I say this is

pure self-indulgence. If they only had a point.

NATIVE NOD - Bread EP (Gern Blandsten/ 305 Haywood Dr/ Paramus NJ/ 07652)

A friend's nine year old child was over while I was listening to this so I asked her what she thought. She said, "It's not like punk rock." She's right. I guess there's a cult audience for this type of stuff and they'll probably eat this up. To me, it's awful: Plodding, meandering emo. Pretentious songs that are way too long, a lyricist who takes himself way too seriously and way too many offbeat changes for ya to ever get your toes a tappin'.

NO FUN AT ALL - Vision CD (Burning Heart Records/ Box 33/ 737 21 Fagersta/ Sweden)

A nine song CD that takes about 17 minutes to run its course. American sounding hardcore done better than your average American band. Fast fast fast, tight, passionate, melodic, plenty of "Whooooah's" and worth every penny.



OFFICIAL HOOLIGANS - EP (\$3.00 to Eugene Records/ P.O. Box 2183/ Meriden CT/ 06450)

A garagey, upbeat band on the label run by The Pist!??? And it's damn good too, sorta like an angry version of the Ne'er Do Wells on cheap beer. Yessir, send your dough today.

PARASITES - Punch Lines CD (Shredder)

Everyone I know who has good taste in music likes the Parasites. I try. I've listened to this five times and only one tune sticks out ("Crazy"). It's just too wimpy and sappy for me. Maybe if they got a more aggressive singer... I don't know, this just doesn't do a goddamn thing for me.



PEGBOY - Fore 12" (1/4 Stick Records)

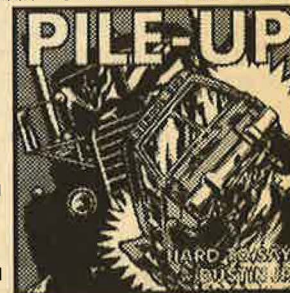
If you expect the wall-of-sound-pop-punk blast that Pegboy usually delivers, this record is gonna depress the hell out of you. Loads of instrumental crap that borders on "experimental", not a hook to latch onto in sight and in general, a very tired feel. This sounds like a completely different band, and not a very good one.

PILE-UP - "Hard To Say" b/w "Dustin Jr." (Theologian)

Excellent cover art... Ummm... We're talkin' no-frills metal with emo vocals. The record looks so good I wanna like it, but christ, it's boring.

THE PROBE #6 - fanzine and double EP (\$6.00 to Aaron Muentz/ P.O. Box 5068/ Pleasanton CA/ 94566)

A fanzine (I don't review fanzines, even when they come packaged all sneakily like this one) that includes a double 7" hardcore comp. On it, you'll find All You Can Eat (yawn-inspiring HC), Lurch (the same but worse), Your Mother (heavy HC with "kooky" parts that make it a chore to listen to), Liquid Courage (testosterone-fueled bore-core) and the Fuckboyz, who are great enough that they shoulda had both records all to themselves. The fanzine is better than the records, featuring a half naked MRR staffer... wait a second, I ain't gonna be suckered into reviewing the 'zine!



PROPAGANDHI - How To Clean A Couple 'o Things EP (\$4.00 to Fat Wreck Chords/ P.O. Box 460144/ San Francisco CA/ 94146)

"Pigs Will Pay" is the featured track here, a catchy, obnoxious little

gem that, hold the presses, is actually anti-PC! Side B is the "Flag" tune from their album. Is it worth it to pick this up for one song? Well, I would. Production, packaging, songwriting, I only wish more bands could put out singles this strong.

PROZAC MEMORY - Accident Prone EP (Faye Records/ P.O. Box 7332/ Columbia MO/ 65205)

PROZAC MEMORY



Accident Prone

I saw Prozac Memory play in St. Louis on Halloween and was less than impressed. This record, however, is pretty hot. They cover the same ground as Jawbreaker without sinking to imitation. They're tight, fast and moody but stop well short of emo-land. Crisp production and they can play their instruments. Buy.

THE QUEERS - Too Dumb To Quit EP (Doheny Records)

Joe and B-Face hook up with ex-singer Wimpy and crank out five amazing hardcore punk tunes the way the Queers were doin' it ten years ago. Already outta print but Joe claims it's gonna be repressed, mebbe on Lookout...

RED AUNTS - Retard Jenny Jones EP (Sympathy For The Record Industry)

Much better than their godawful debut EP. The A-side features two cranking punk-n-roll numbers that'll have you blasting yer stereo. The B-side is weaker: sloppy, disjointed stuff that doesn't need to be on this record. One of the best looking picture discs I've ever seen.



THE RIP-OFFS - EP (\$4.00 to Rip Off Records/ 581 Maple Av/ San Bruno CA/ 94066)

Jon Von leaves the Mr. T Experience, joins up with members of Supercharger and The Fingers and creates a loud, noisy two song single. It's garage punk with a smile and a kick in the pants. A one sided disc with no back cover art, recorded on a six track cassette machine. Cut hot so the trashy sound

quality just makes everything better. I think THIS is what D.I.Y. is all about.

SHITBIRDS - Oh Joy! 10" (Sympathy For The Record Industry)

When you do a full color jacket featuring art by the creator of Ren & Stimpy, you better follow through with great music. Five covers out of eight tunes ain't a good way to start. Lousy hardcore with crappy production doesn't help. The one good tune here is "You Said That", but I still think this is pointless unless you're an art collector.

SICKO - EP (Empty Records)



This has been out for a while but I picked it up on impulse and felt it was my duty to tell ya about it. They did a split EP with the MTX earlier this year which makes sense - the singer sounds like he could be Dr. Frank's younger brother. The music is textbook East bay pop-punk the way no one in the East bay is doing it anymore. Consistently good tunes. Get it.

SINKHOLE - Groping For Trout CD (Ringin' Ear Records/ 9 Maplecrest/ Newmarket NH/ 03857-1401)

Pop-core featuring some ex-A.G.'s members. This has a bit of a Descendents feel; tight and catchy with "jumpy" parts where the

band stops for 1/16th of a second and kicks back in, a style favored by bands like NOFX and Face To Face as well. Aside from a ridiculous Styx cover, this one's a keeper.

STICKS AND STONES - Theme Song For Nothing LP (Gern Blandsten)

I first heard this as a demo over a year ago, I'm glad to see this Jersey band has found a label. I still have the same problems with it that I did then - although there are some really great songs here, it's on the "lite" side of pop-punk; a lot of the tunes on here are incredibly wimpy. Like I said, there are some outstanding songs, like "Saved", "The Lot", "Beautiful Extreme" and the title track, but I can't stand that flowery acoustic shit.

SUGAR BRITCHES - EP (Theologian)

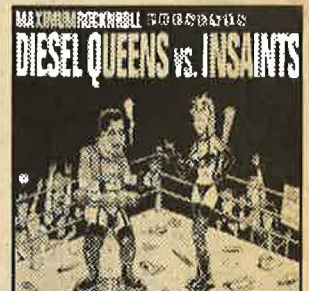
Although the music on this one is really cool, the singer seems to be in a different band, like he's goofing off in front of a microphone or something. Too bad 'cause it has the potential to be great.

V/A - CHARTA 77/ KOTT GROTTORNA - No Limit Mini-CD (Bird Nest Records)

The first tune is both bands doing a pop song like The Cure gone bad - no good. Then Charta 77 does "Safety Pin Stuck in My Heart" which sounds like late period Scorpions gone bad - no good. Kott Grottorna finishes up with "The Ornithologists", sorta like a slower Def Leppard gone bad - no good.

V/A - DIESEL QUEENS VS. THE INSAINTS - double 7" EP (Maximum Rock'N'Roll)

Yeah, Tim Yohannan's girlfriend is in the Insaints. Ok? Ok. First up, the Diesel Queens smash through five Meatmen-inspired tunes leaving fifty punks dead in their wake without having to call in the tag team. Excellent. The Insaints, despite assertions from literally everyone I know that they suck, enter the ring with some incredibly strong punk tunes (particularly "Losers Club" and "Stupid Boy") and put up a good fight. The Diesel Queens win but I wouldn't mind a rematch. Excellent sleeve artwork and thankfully, no partially hidden bananas.

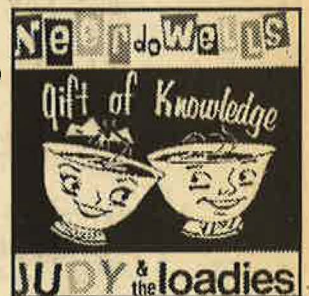


V/A - It's A Punk Thing, You Wouldn't Understand 12" (\$6.00 to Shakefork Records/ P.O. Box 9711/ Downers Grove IL/ 60515)

An eight song Chicago band compilation. There's been a lot of these lately and this is one of the better ones. Why? Fantastic cover art and great songs from the Bollweevils, Friction and Heel.

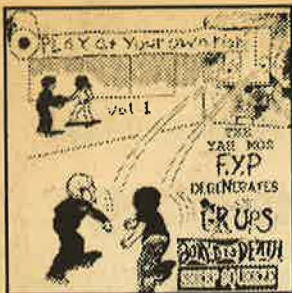
V/A - NE'ER DO WELLS/JUDY AND THE LOADIES - Gift Of Knowledge CD (Lookout Records/ P.O. Box 11374/ Berkeley CA/ 94701)

The Ne'er Do Wells give us 17 early sixties-influenced, surf-soaked tunes that'll make ya wanna grab yer partner and do the Watusi. After a short intermission, Judy & The Loadies give us more of the same with female vocals and not-quite-as-good songs. A fine product just the same.



V/A - Play At Your Own Risk - EP (\$3.00 to Recess Records/ P.O. Box 1112/ Torrance CA/90505)

Ok, Sheep Squeeze claim to be the worst band on the peninsula - trust me, their suckiness covers a much wider territory. Bored To Death is ok hardcore, ditto for the Degenerates. The B-side of this disc is much better, featuring a killer tune from F.Y.P. which reminds me of early Jerry's Kids, an above aver-



VIA - A Very Punk Christmas - double 7" EP (\$6.00 to Further Beyond Records/ 1210 Gregory Place/ Downers Grove IL/ 60515)

A very dumb idea. Eight Chicago area bands each take a weak stab at an X-mas tune and fall flat on their rosy-cheeked faces. At least it provides conclusive proof that Cap'n Jazz is the cruddiest, most pretentious band in Chicago.

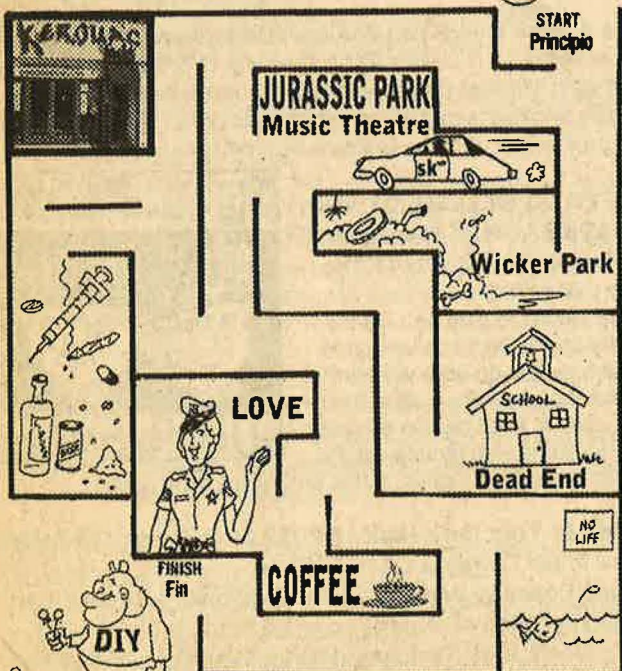
VOODOO GLOWSKULLS - Dog Pile EP (Dr. Strange Records/ P.O. Box 7000-17/ Alta Loma CA/ 91701)
I've been hearing about this band for years so naturally I was



eager to get my grubby hands on this record. The title track is rad; catchy punk with horns - a combo that would normally make me heave. Interestingly, they pretty much drop the horns on side B and what's left is a mediocre hardcore band with a lousy singer and drummer. Kinduva disappointment.

EBB! PO BOX 397
Skokie IL 60076-0397

Chicago—as long as it sucks,
I'll have something to
write about...



\$1 by mail

WHITE FLAG - Third Sun Mower EP (Munster Records/ P.O. Box 18107/ Madrid 28080/ Spain)

Another beautifully packaged Munster release; full color cover with a gatefold sleeve and a nice thick spine for the title. White Flag, one of my favorite bands a few years ago, lets me down on this one by wimping out. Even a couple of Muffs joining in don't help this much, save for the Kinks cover, "I Need You", when the Flag finally turn up their guitars. I know White Flag have been wearing their Beatles influences on their sleeves for quite a while now, but I still expect wacked out spazz rockers whenever I hear their name. Oh well, if you want classic White Flag, check out "S Is For Space", "Zero Hour", "Third Strike" or better yet, the just released W.F. retrospective collection on Munster.

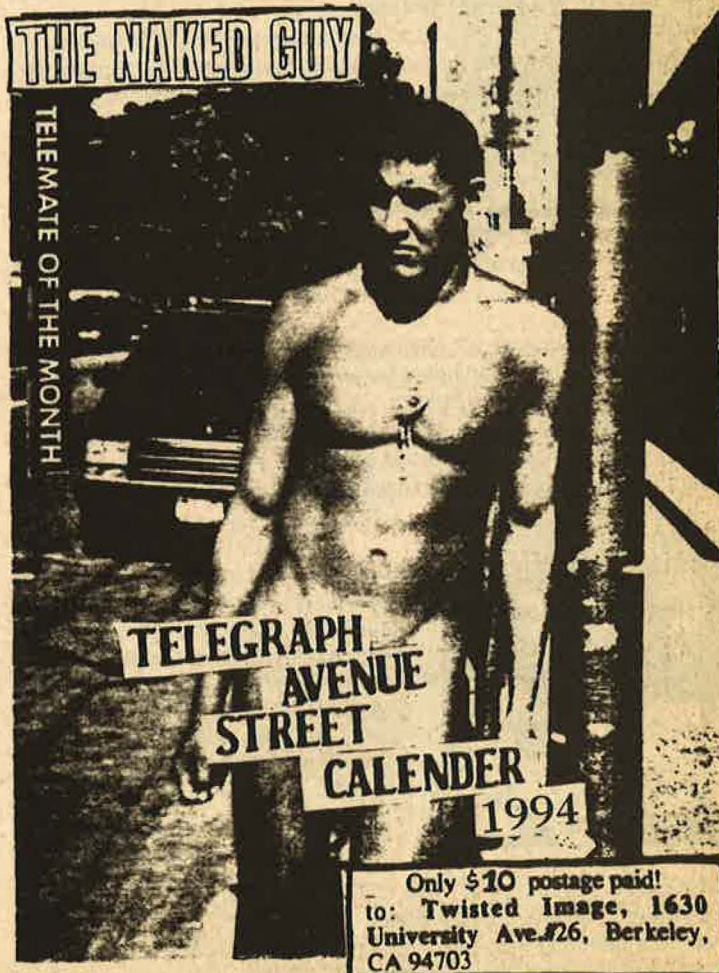


THE ZEROS - "I Don't Wanna" b/w "Li'l Latin Lupe Lu" (Sympathy For The Record Industry)

Old school drunk punk. I'm talkin' rock and fucking roll. This would be good for parties when things are just about to get a little out of hand.

ZIPGUN - Baltimore CD (Empty Records)

Don't let the lame cover fool ya - this is hi-energy punk rock that delivers the goods from start to finish. So fucking good, I'd pay for it.



RAMONES

We've all heard the rah-rah-rah-ing for the Ramones probably more times than we'd care to in the past five years. We know that they've influenced everybody and everything, we know that they changed the face of rock and roll, we know that they've inspired countless bands to form. But this is all praise without substance. The Ramones have never broken through to a mainstream audience and it's doubtful they ever will. Existing on the fringes of mainstream rock for 20 years now, you'd think they woulda given it up.

And yet they're still cranking out albums and still touring like crazy. And all the talk about the legendary Ramones still hasn't put them in the position where they're, well, living legends. They're still four guys from New York, still banging out tunes one after another in medium sized clubs in Anywhere, U.S.A. and they're still not making it big. Only now, they don't seem to care.

A recent book entitled "Ramones - An American Band" (St. Martin's Press) pushes the legend shit to an extreme. Written with all the insight and wit of an unauthorized Vanilla Ice biography, the book examines at great length the producers and record company executives who BELIEVED in the Ramones, yet it barely touches on the bizarre and fucked up times of the late 70's punk scene which the Ramones ruled. For instance, their drug use is a closed door (except when the writer excerpts a *Spin* interview with Dee Dee, who talks about his smack problems), Johnny getting clobbered on the head and sent to the hospital over a girl? Barely mentioned. Danny Fields? In the book, he's a responsible, upright journalist - not the guy that punk kids like Jim Testa used to see walking through the park with young boys on a dog leash. The excess we know existed is ignored, as if it is without historical significance.

We could say then that the book is noble because it doesn't sink to the level of today's trash tv-style tabloids by trying to dig up dirt wher-

ever it can be found. But I think the real answer can be found in the fact that it's an authorized biography, essentially a paperback promotional release.

I wonder if the "dirt" isn't an integral part of not only the Ramones' beginnings, but of the punk scene in general.

Everything is so neat and tidy in the book, one gets the impression that the Ramones have always been a bunch of upright, business-like adults just trying to make some good ol' rock and roll for the kids. Maybe that is all they're trying to do - but the book robs the Ramones of their character, in particular, that of Johnny Ramone.

When I decided to try to get an interview with the Ramones, I figured it would be a harmless waste of time, certain that I'd never get past their manager's secretary. Then Jim Testa (*Jersey Beat* fanzine) informed me that they had a new album coming out and were hungry for publicity. He gave me a number to call and I was off.

In my best bullshitting voice, I explained to Jaydee at Middleburg

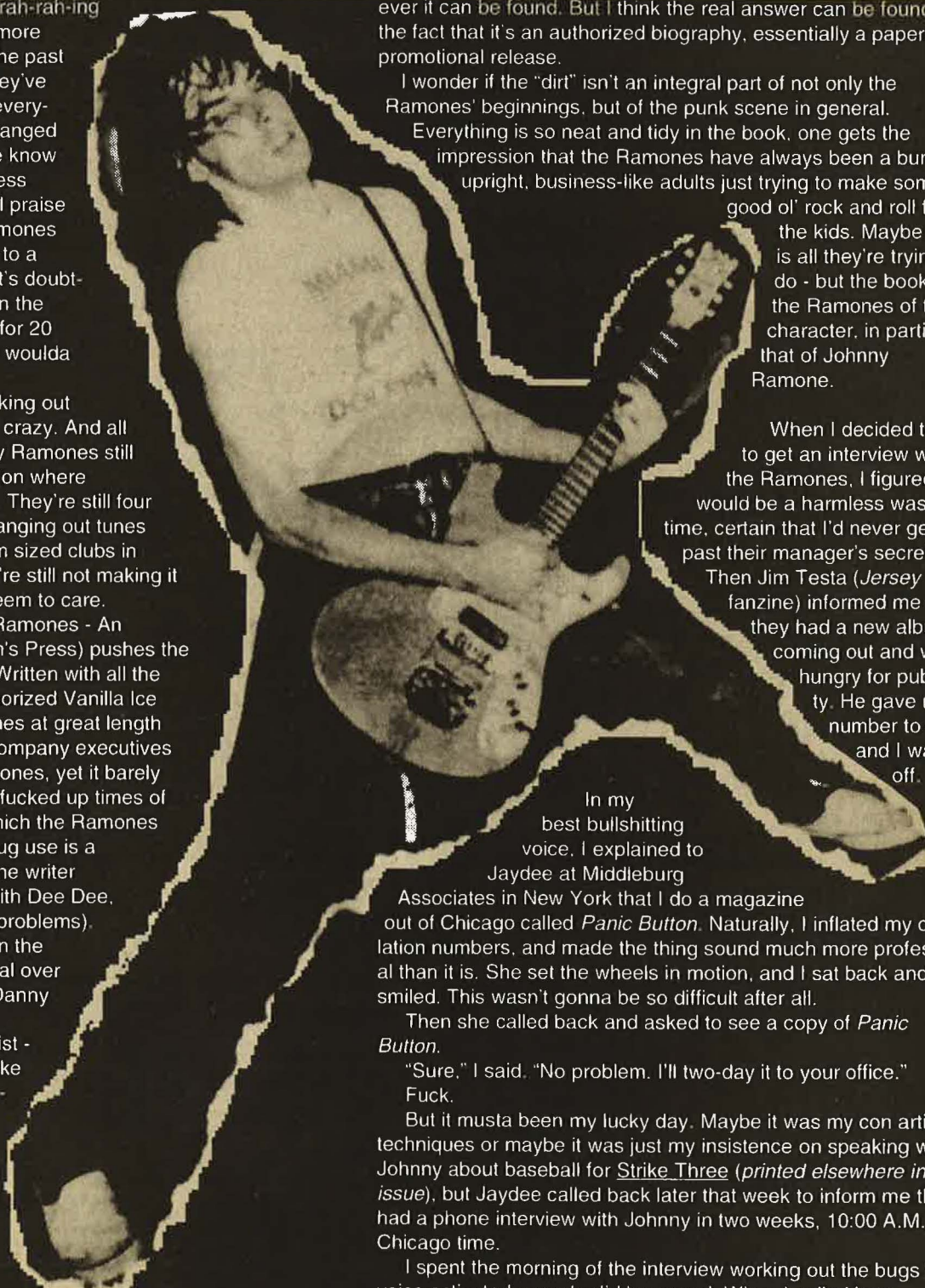
Associates in New York that I do a magazine out of Chicago called *Panic Button*. Naturally, I inflated my circulation numbers, and made the thing sound much more professional than it is. She set the wheels in motion, and I sat back and smiled. This wasn't gonna be so difficult after all.

Then she called back and asked to see a copy of *Panic Button*.

"Sure," I said. "No problem. I'll two-day it to your office." Fuck.

But it musta been my lucky day. Maybe it was my con artist techniques or maybe it was just my insistence on speaking with Johnny about baseball for *Strike Three* (printed elsewhere in this issue), but Jaydee called back later that week to inform me that I had a phone interview with Johnny in two weeks, 10:00 A.M. Chicago time.

I spent the morning of the interview working out the bugs in the voice activated recorder I'd borrowed. When I called in to Overland Productions, management firm for the Ramones, I was told that Johnny hadn't called in yet for the hook-up. I should try



back in ten minutes. Ten minutes later, and Johnny's still not there. Ten minutes after that, same answer. Finally, I get a call back from Kirk at Overland.

"Johnny thought he was supposed to come down here for the interview. He's on his way now."

At noon, Kirk called back and handed me over to Johnny. Instantly, the New York twang assuaged me.

"Are you in New York?"

"No," I said. "Chicago."

And that's all it took to get him started on baseball. Just my luck, too, Johnny's a big Cubs fan. We talked baseball for a while and then I commented on the great production on the new Ramones album, an all-covers trip back to the sixties called "Acid Eaters." It's already obvious that Johnny Ramone is not another Joey Ramone and this is not going to be an interview about how world-changing the Ramones' mighty influence has been. Johnny's down to earth, pragmatic and levelheaded. Having just listened to their new album two hours ago, I mention the fact that for the most part, the songs on "Acid Eaters" aren't obvious choices.

"Right, I tried to avoid that. I fought outside pressure to do hits, the songs that people know. In some ways I had to compromise by agreeing on a certain, like, Rolling Stones song or a Who song, but the actual songs were our choice. There was still a lot of pressure. After I picked the first six or seven songs, they said, 'We've never heard any of these.' I found a Seeds song and they only know one Seeds song - 'Pushin' Too Hard', and we do a dif-

ferent one."

The press release for "Acid Eaters" states that since the Ramones have influenced so many bands, they thought it would be fun to turn people on to the stuff that influenced THEM. What started out as an ep quickly turned into a full-length album.

"We had fun picking the songs and trying to decide whether to do the song exactly like the original or adapt it to our style. Like, when I heard 'My Back Pages', I was thinking, this guy writes lyrics like Dee Dee. Then I envisioned it as a Ramones song and said, forget about his version, let's do it our way."

Ok, the interview is moving along nicely. "Acid Eaters" is actually a surprisingly good album. But there are some problems with it. So here I am, talking to one of the biggest heroes in my life, and I have to bring up an ugly fact. I point out that most of the tunes sound like Ramones songs, except for "Somebody To Love" and "Substitute." I really don't wanna bash the guy but...

"Those are two of my least favorites," he says, saving me the embarrassment.

Figuring I don't have to pull my punches, I remark that the album has an energy that was lacking on their last few studio albums.

"I liked 'Mondo Bizarro'."

Oops. I have to confess I haven't heard that one.

"Ok, well that's one of the better ones, probably the best since 'Too Tough To Die'. Much better than the three previous ones. Try to give it a listen."

I will. Forging onward, my eggshell-trodding sneakers firmly in



RAMONES 1986 - PHOTO BY SHAWN SCALLEN

place, I tell him that I really didn't like the last two studio albums at all.

"Ok," he says, sounding as if he's taking it down on a pad of paper. He's not upset, unless he's real good at hiding it. "The producers tend to take the energy out of things. They get too slick. It's not us. We go in there and we're just ready to play and they start doing whatever it is they do to things."

The production really sucked on "Brain Drain", I offer, because the guitars are barely audible.

There's a brief pause. Christ, I'm thinking, I really pissed the guy off this time.

"Was that the album prior to 'Mondo Bizarro'?" he asks.

I can't help laughing - I swear, this is I guy I can relate to. He's laughing a little too, but he ain't lying.

"I can't remember one from the other at this point," he explains. "The producer on that one wanted too many tracks of guitars. He was putting down six tracks of guitars and I'm going, 'Well, I don't really like this.' There should be more like two tracks of guitars. Y'know, I can't hear what I'm doing anymore and it gets watered down. I didn't like it. But he's the producer and if you

don't like it, you just don't work with the guy again. Now, we just did a song last week with Daniel Rey for a Johnny Thunders benefit album and the production came out really good. Everything, bright, clear, we just went in and did the song in an hour."

This is amazing to me, that a band that's been around as long as the Ramones can just go in and knock out a tune like that.

Johnny's matter-of-fact about it. "That's the way I wanna do it. I just like going in and playing. I don't have the patience for sitting there and doing multiple takes. It waters things down, I know that, the fans see it and I see it. But the producers and other people don't see it. I mean, they... they gotta make it slick, they gotta do their job."

Why don't the Ramones produce themselves?

"That'd be impossible. I mean, Joey... every song, no matter how loud the vocal is, he thinks it should be louder. Then Mark will say, 'I don't hear the cymbals, I don't hear the tom-tom's.' They just sit there and keep putting their two cents in. We'd end up with a vocal/drumming album."

For a long time, it seemed that the Ramones were desperately trying for a big hit, and right around "Too Tough To Die" they gave up on that whole idea. After working with producers like Phil Spector and Graham Gouldman, the band seemed to take back the reins and just do what they do best. While the production nightmares were happening, Johnny's interest in the band decreased considerably.

"At times, you're fighting a battle by yourself and it becomes hard. I got worn down by it. There was a period of time, like on 'Pleasant Dreams', where I got tired of fighting against it. I didn't care about having a hit - of course you wanna sell records, but all I care about is selling records (by) doing what the Ramones do

best. And having the fans at least like the album. But I have people come up to me and tell me that 'Pleasant Dreams' is their favorite Ramones record and they're Ramones fans, so it's not everyone who feels this way. I feel that way. It's my least favorite album. I don't like that album at all. There's a lot of good songs on it, but... Graham Gouldman, he was a really lightweight guy, I mean, we should know that when we take someone from 10cc. But we were stuck with no producer and he was the only guy who wanted to do it and we couldn't afford anybody else. And at the same time, you have to deal with the record company, you have to deal with management and you have to deal with the rest of the band.

"On 'Subterranean Jungle,' I got interested again as far as trying to stop what I saw was happening, and by 'Too Tough To Die' we'd gotten refocused as a band. But sometimes to be able to continue to put out records, you have to say, ok, on one song we'll do what you want, like when they brought in Dave Stewart. What I did is I said, 'Ok, you leave me alone on the other eleven songs and we'll let this guy do what he wants on the one song.' And I feel like that sorta worked out ok."

On mid-80's albums like "Animal Boy" and "Halfway To Sanity", Joey Ramone adopted a weird style of singing, which was more like a deep, gruff yelling. The smooth, goon-like quality of his strange voice was gone, replaced by a sound that would be more appropriate for a hardcore band. On the last two studio albums, it seems as if the old Joey Ramone is back, singing better than ever.

"I don't know why he got into that thing he does with his voice. I hear it too but I don't say nothin' 'cause you can't really discuss it with him. He probably did it and somebody told him it sounded good. I like it better when he's just singing."

The line on Joey is that he's not a good interview 'cause he doesn't like to talk, I mention. I also gingerly bring

up Joey's tendency to tout the Ramones as the second coming of rock and roll.

"Well, I don't like doing interviews," says Johnny. "The only reason I took this one is 'cause they said you wanted to talk about baseball. Ok, we went over to England in '76 and we met The Clash and The Damned and they said, 'We got your album and we started a band. We haven't even rehearsed yet, but we're gonna see you guys tonight and we'll probably start rehearsing next week.' So I've heard it from a lot of bands. But Joey.... I can't listen to it. It's the same thing, y'know, that we've influenced everything. C'mon, it's not for us to say who we've influenced."

In the past couple of years, the Ramones have gone through some radical changes. First, Dee Dee, who had been in the band from the beginning, quit. Though he's still on speaking terms with the band, and continues to write songs for them (including some of the best songs on "Mondo Bizarro"), he is committed to staying on his own, singing in his own band, The Chinese Dragons, and working on his side of the Ramones story (which could explain why he wouldn't give an interview to the author of "Ramones").

RAMONES 1994 - PHOTO BY DANNY CLINCH



"Dee Dee's written a whole pile of songs. Some of 'em will be on the next record. For a while we didn't talk, but I never had anything against him. He did what he had to do with his life. I don't know if it was a smart decision, but he wanted to change his life. He left his wife and then he left the band. He wanted to deal with life with no responsibilities, which is sort of impossible."

Dee Dee's replacement was a guy in his twenties named CJ, who, despite the difference in age between he and the other members, fits right in. He even sings lead on some of the songs on "Mondo Bizarro" and "Acid Eaters", a role the vocally challenged Dee Dee used to play. By contrast, CJ is a great singer and maybe even gives the rest of the band a bit of a kick in the ass...

The band also changed labels after the "Loco Live" album, leaving Sire for Radioactive, a label run by their manager. But ultimately, it's Johnny who holds the Ramones together - it's his practical, punk rock attitude that keeps them from turning into an obscene parody of themselves. Exhibit A: On "Acid Eaters", the producer came up with some guitar leads for a few of the songs. Rather than waste time trying to learn them, Johnny had him go in and record the tracks himself.

"It saves time," he says plainly. "He already knows the part, so why shouldn't he play it? I don't wanna fool around with the thing for an hour. I was more concerned with getting the right sound."

Somehow, the same thing keeps coming up. What about all the talk about so many bands being influenced by the Ramones? If that's true, why do most of them suck? I wonder aloud whatever happened to listening to Buddy Holly and Chuck Berry?

Knowing that I'm 25 years old, Johnny seems a little surprised.

"You know all the old shit then. That's great, 'cause too many kids today don't know it. I always discuss this with CJ. I tell him, 'CJ, you listen to music all day long but you don't know anything that came prior to ten years ago. You know all the new bands and everything, but you don't listen to your rock and roll.' It seems like all the new bands do that, too. They don't know rock and roll. All they know is current bands they've been influenced by and copied."

Johnny doesn't listen to much new music. He spends his time watching as many baseball games as possible and during the off-season, when he's not touring and recording, he spends his days hunting down rare horror and science fiction videos. He watches Mystery Science Theater 3000 every night. He doesn't spend his time checking out new bands. Referring to a quote from Joey about how much better mainstream music is today than it was back when the Ramones started, I ask Johnny his opinion.

"I don't see it at all. I've heard Joey say that, too. When we started, there wasn't much there, but it was still a lot better than this. It's reached an all-time low. Now all you hear is rap shit everywhere, even on commercials. Once the Chicago Bears did a rap song, I thought, ok, this should be the end of rap. But that was just the beginning. And it's the same exact shit for I don't even know how long, six, eight years?"

"I don't listen to music much now. There's just so much bad stuff. I'm sure there are some good bands but doing this so much I have to separate myself from it. Y'know, for my mental health."

What about the "alternative" music, like Nirvana and Pearl Jam?

"The Nirvana record was good. I don't have it but I heard four or five songs repeatedly, the hits, and they were good songs. I watched 'em on

some TV awards show and it didn't seem like they'd be really good live. I saw Pearl Jam on the show getting an award and playing with Neil Young. I thought that was absurd. Neil Young is this old, blown-out hippie jumping around. Pearl Jam? I don't see nothin' there. They might buy our records, they might be Ramones fans, but I don't really see nothin' there. The guy

sings good, but I don't like the stupid outfits they wear. They're always walking around with shorts on and everybody looks like... I don't know what happened to rock and roll, y'know, there was a time when you had an image and looked cool on stage. Now you gotta go up there and look like a dork!"

Yeah, there's no doubt this guy's from New York.

Now comes the big question, at least to me. Is he comfortable with

where he's at, or is he bitter that the Ramones have always just missed hitting it big.

"Well, both. I'm comfortable with where we're at." He pauses for a few seconds. "At times I also feel like maybe we deserved a little better. Y'know, you see Nirvana sell 10 million records and we go sell 200,000. Guns and Roses is doing a punk cover album, y'know, and they're doing a Dead Boys tune. The Dead Boys were a great band, but I wish they'd done a Ramones song too. But I guess it ain't no big deal. These bands all talk about how much they were influenced by the Ramones, but when they get big, we try to get on a tour with them and it just doesn't happen..."

"But I'm also thankful every day when I get up that I can do this for a living. As far as how much longer I wanna do it, I don't know. I basically, at the most, take it one year at a time. I just wanna make sure I can look back and tell when we're not good anymore."

If their recent studio recordings aren't at the level of "Leave Home" or "Rocket To Russia", the Ramones are still blasting out some good tunes ("Mondo Bizarro" really is their best album in years), and live, there's still no band that can touch them.

But to portray this band as living legends or, as the cheeseball "Ramones" book claims, "The Grateful Dead of punk", is ridiculous. The Ramones, I think, are exactly what they've always been. Four punks from New York who play the kind of music nobody else has the balls to come close to. With a singer who's as far from being a pretty boy as possible and a guitarist who would rather watch tv than practice, these guys shouldn't be applauded for being radical, they should be applauded for doing what every band oughta do - for being real, for dropping the rock star bullshit.

Yeah, we love 'em for their attitude, but we sure don't wanna do anything tangible to show our admiration, do we? And yet no matter how much bullshit we hear from rock critics who sing their praises ten years too late and big name bands who just love Johnny & Co. but are scared to death that putting them on an opening bill might mean that the Ramones will blow 'em away, the Kings of Queens still come through. Yep, they can always be counted on to come to your town, put on a great live show, and leave you feeling like, "Shit, I'm just a regular person too. Maybe I can get together with my friends and pick up a guitar and..."

That type of inspiration comes from the straight ahead, no-bullshit, real-life attitude that the Ramones have had for twenty years. And if you're looking for that attitude from Pearl Jam or Nirvana... well, good luck, chump.

I don't see nothin' there. The guy sings good, but I don't like the stupid outfits they wear... always walking around with shorts on. There was a time when you had an image and looked cool on stage. Now you gotta go up there and look like a dork.

- Johnny Ramone on Pearl Jam



RAMONES FULL-LENGTH ALBUMS

photo by Shawn Scallen

Ramones (1976)****

The best punk rock album of all time. Three chords and moronic lyrics that were just perfect. It took the mainstream media fifteen years to figure out that "Blitzkrieg Bop" is a great tune. If you don't love this record, don't even bother starting a band.

Leave Home (1977)****

The Ramones leave the Beatles-style production of their first album behind, opting instead for a thick, heavy sound which works just right on songs like "Pinhead" and not so great on stuff like "You're Gonna Kill That Girl". Still an amazing album with nothing but excellent tunes from start to finish.

Rocket To Russia (1977)****

Johnny Ramone's favorite of the 15 albums he's done. Not all the tunes are outstanding, but the great production and songs like "I Don't Care" & "Teenage Lobotomy" (possibly the greatest tune they wrote) keeps this in the "must own" section.

Road To Ruin (1978)***

Well, it doesn't suck. Contains "I Just Wanna Have Something To Do", a great version of "Needles and Pins" and of course, "I Wanna Be Sedated". Unfortunately, it also contains "Questioningly".

It's Alive (1979)****

Yeah, a double live album recorded in London on New Year's Eve, 1977. Forget about "RamonesMania" & "All the Stuff and More", this is the definitive Ramones collection. The sound is great and it perfectly captures the feel of a live Ramones show.

End Of The Century (1980)* 1/2

While working on the great flick *Rock 'N' Roll Highschool*, the Ramones asked legendary nuthouse escapee Phil Spector to produce their new album. The result is an overproduced fiasco with a few bright spots - "Do You Remember Rock 'N' Roll Radio", "Chinese Rocks" and "Rock 'N' Roll Highschool". The rest is a lame attempt to commercialize the Ramones. They're even desperate enough to rip off some of their old tunes ("The Return Of Jackie And Judy", "This Ain't Havana"). Sad.

Pleasant Dreams (1981)** 1/2

Not as bad as is commonly thought - it really showcases both Joey's faults and virtues in his songwriting. Though the production is pretty weak, it's a relief after the overkill of "End Of The Century", an album which Joey goes back to so he can steal "I'm Affected" and turn it into "We Want The Airwaves" (which is a better song anyway). Side 1 is great, with the exception of "It's Not My Place (In The 9 To 5 World)". Side 2 sucks with the exception of "She's A Sensation".

Subterranean Jungle (1983)*

Joey starts screaming instead of singing. Aside from a few covers and "Psycho Therapy", this one is pretty awful.

Too Tough To Die (1984)***

Sorta like a comeback album. It ain't "Leave Home", but considering they'd been around for ten years, it sounds damn good. Noteworthy for being the album on which they stopped trying to do their first four albums over and moved ahead.

Animal Boy (1986)*** 1/2

A stronger album than "Too Tough To Die". Almost every tune on here is great. By now, Joey is singing everything like his throat's bleeding, but by then I'd figured his voice had just changed.

Halfway To Sanity (1987)1/2 *

"I Wanna Live" and "Real Cool Time" are great songs. The rest of this album is incredibly terrible.

Brain Drain (1989)1/2 *

Three good songs: "Pet Sematary", "I Believe In Miracles" and "Merry Christmas (I Don't Want to Fight Tonight)". With the exception of "Pet Sematary" and "Merry Christmas", the production sucks- the guitars can barely be heard. Bleeachh.

Loco Live (1991)*

Pales in comparison to "It's Alive". The sound isn't as good and Joey's vocal histrionics ruin every song that could've come off great. He embarrasses himself on almost everything, but check out "Surfin' Bird" for a real hoot.

Mondo Bizarro (1992)*** 1/2

Joey's singing again, and even though Dee Dee's out of the band, he's written some good songs for this album, like "Poison Heart" and "Strength To Endure". Joey gives us the horrible "Censorshit", rips off "Rock 'N' Roll Highschool" on an awful tune called "Touring" but wins big with a great tune called (urp) "Heidi Is A Headcase". For the most part, Joey's songwriting has improved: check out "I Won't Let It Happen" and "It's Gonna Be Alright" - two of his best songs in many moons. Mondo Bizarro is one of the few Ramones albums from the last ten years that I listen to over and over.

Acid Eaters (1994)***

The Ramones cover hippie songs and breathe some life into them. Again, Joey's back to singing like his old self and bassist CJ sings on a few tunes (he sang on a couple on "Mondo Bizarro" too). Though "Substitute" (backing vocals by Pete Townshend - yuk), "Somebody To Love" (backing vocals by Traci Lords) and "Have You Ever Seen The Rain" are pretty bad, raging versions of "Seven & Seven Is", "My Back Pages", and "Journey To The Center Of The Mind" more than make up for it. "Surf City" comes close to being great, but leaves out the line, "Two girls for every boy" which is criminal in my book. The best tune on the album is a better-than-the-original-by-ten-miles version of the Rolling Stones' "Out Of Time". This is one of the best cover albums to come out lately. I just wish the Ramones had covered great songs from the 1950's instead. Oh well.

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